

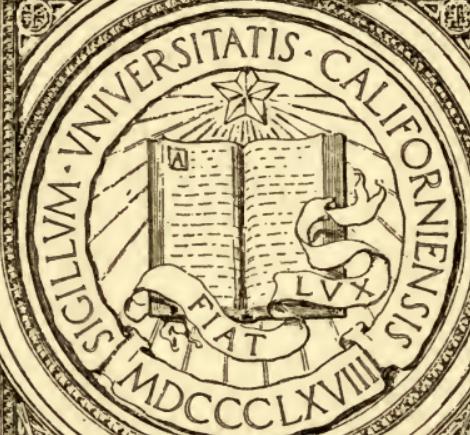
# HIGH NOON

*By*

ALICE BROWN



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**HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY**

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# HIGH NOON



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*By ALICE BROWN*

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"One instant only is the sun at noon." —*From the Persian.*



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BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
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ALICE BROWN  
ALUMNA OF HARVARD COLLEGE

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## A MEETING IN THE MARKET-PLACE



## A MEETING IN THE MARKET-PLACE

THIS story begins with a letter :—

DEAR MR. STAFFORD,—I am in rather peculiar circumstances, and so I am going to make a peculiar request of you. Since I came to know you so well, in our two weeks' quarantine, you have been very dear to me. If you were a woman, I should have said so long ago, and tried to make you a familiar friend. If I had been a man, I should have run in, at least three times a week, to smoke a pipe with you ; and we might have heard the chimes at midnight. But being what we are, and the fabric of our social system being what it is, I acquiesce in the fact that you probably knew best how to order your own affairs.

Some days ago I learned, quite by accident (for the family meant to keep the secret to themselves), that I am not to live many weeks. Yet I am very comfortable, and I crave a little more of life than life seems likely to offer me. Could you come to see me sometimes while I

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am visible, and let me know you a little in the way I have often dwelt on in fancy, as if there were no conventions and no human fallibility of understanding? I have two reasons for asking this. I want to see you more than any one whom I do *not* see, and I can talk freely to you with the certainty that you will not be in the least moved, except from a general and humane point of view, by the fact that I am to die. Will you come?

EDITH PRINCE.

John Stafford read the letter through twice, and then got up, pushed aside the sheets of his essay on realism in literature, and walked twice back and forth through his littered room. Piles of paper lay here, books for review there, and a beer-mug stood on the folds of a gay kimono; but he threaded his way among that admired disorder with the ease of a man blind to external circumstance. Stafford's room was a strange medley of the precious and chaotic; but no landlady or slavey ever found fault with his wayward habits. One gift, which he exercised quite unconsciously, was that of disarming criticism. It had long stood him in good stead. He took off his spectacles and held them meditatively

before him as he walked ; and his face, gentle, dreamy, and almost mystical, when devoid of their glittering bulwark, took on a look of appealing perplexity.

“ Queer world ! ” he said aloud. “ Mighty queer world ! ” And having found no solution in delay, he thrust the letter into a drawer, made his toilet, and rushed away to call upon his old-time acquaintance. He had a vague fear of her dying before he got there.

When he was ushered into Edith Prince’s special sitting-room, he was conscious of an exasperated relief, as if a bad joke had been played upon him and he had found out its falsity. The room seemed quite unlike the rest of that obtrusively magnificent house. It was furnished in very light blue and white, and gave an exquisite sense of purity. Edith herself wore a soft white dress full of beautiful folds, with generous draperies. It seemed to his perplexed glance that she had not changed at all in the six months since they had met, except, perhaps, that the hollows under her eyes made her look what she really was, a woman of thirty-five. The only informality in this strangely informal meeting was that she was lying down, and that she gave him her hand without rising.

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"Bring that chair out of the corner, please," she said, "and make yourself happy in it. It's so big you fancy it is n't going to be comfortable; but you can spread yourself and luxuriate."

Stafford obeyed awkwardly. He could not speak. No existing combination of words fitted the occasion. But Edith went on, drawing a shining blue silk shawl about her shoulders :—

"Now, tell me what you are doing."

Stafford indulged in a breath of relief. At least the preface was not to be other-worldly.

"Nothing," he said. "Next to nothing. Hack-work—pot-boilers. You saw my last little book?"

"Yes, I saw it."

"Like it?"

"No, not a bit."

"Why not?"

"You 've degenerated into the would-be critic. In five years more people are going to say : 'Look at John Stafford ! He is one of the men who promised and never performed. He did a little creative work, and then sat down to bully other people for not doing theirs better.' "

He took off his glasses, threw back his head, and laughed. For the moment he forgot the

circumstances of their meeting ; and holding the frankest of mental attitudes, the attack pleased him mightily.

"A one-book man !" said he. " Go on. I can stand a lot."

She smiled, and he noted how blue her eyes were.

"Far be it from me to touch the giants of criticism," she continued, with a pretty humility. "But you're not analyst and critic *au naturel*. Neither do you strain after Hazlitt's style and Ruskin's clarity of vision. And after all, why should you? You haven't the scent for game. The true critic is born with a nose. You are merely carping because fortune has disappointed you, and it's easier to find fault with the existing scheme of things — even literary things — than to better it, or bear it with fortitude."

He was looking at her seriously.

"I wonder if that can be true," he said, searching about in his memory. "I am conscious of disappointment, but I never formulated the cause, and nobody ever did for me. I should have said that I did some creative work once, and then my invention failed."

"Why did it fail?"

"I don't know."

"I think it died for lack of food. You didn't go on making life richer. It seemed rich to you in the beginning because all your experiences were new. With one's thirtieth year, perhaps, there comes a dead point. Life seems to withdraw what she gave. But she does n't really withdraw it. She says, 'Here are all the beauties you saw before. Once I offered them to you. Now I leave them for you to pick up.' You didn't pick them up, you see."

Stafford was silent for a moment, and when he did speak it was in a low tone, and without looking at her.

"I should have said that life demanded too much of me, and that I exhausted in living what some men spend in art. I was left alone, you know—my mother, my two brothers. Those deaths meant a great deal to me. Then there were disappointments that one does n't talk about. There does n't seem to be any equivalent in ordinary speech for what the novelists call a broken heart."

He looked up at her and smiled rather sorrowfully. But she met his eyes with a bright

serenity which gave him a kind of warmth at the heart. He had never noticed that look in her before.

"You must let me be hard," she continued, "and insist that if you had striven you could have made your tears into the water to turn your mill. I would n't have had you feel less; I would n't have anybody. Life is the true thing, and art is the garment; but I do believe, as I believed years ago, that you were divinely endowed."

He drew a long breath and the blood mounted to his forehead. It was sweet to be so recognized. She went on:—

"Sometimes, I know, one does exhaust the spring in the beginning. Sometimes it happens that one is n't born with enough insight to keep on translating the things of God, or seeing the world as it really is; but I believe you were gifted. Listen to this." She took a little worn book from the table beside her and scanned a page where it fell open of itself. "Listen to this." She read a verse here, a verse there: read them well, with a quiet, dramatic intensity. "Is n't that insight? And is n't it music? That is the kind of thing to uphold the rest of us who

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are not articulate ; when we get tempestuous we can read ourselves calm. You see we need a man who can say things like that ; we need to have him grow and grow."

Stafford bent forward a little. He spoke impetuously.

"Did you need me at all ?"

She met his gaze frankly.

"Very much," she answered. "I needed you to be noble, and to go on ministering to me. I needed you terribly at one time. I needed to know that such a man could keep on saying even more splendid things when he stood where the stress and storm were greatest."

"I am sorry" — he began bitterly, but she smiled.

"Never mind," she said. "Never mind that part of it. I dare say it was good for me. There's always a reflex action, you know. Often it's beneficial."

"And what was it, this time ?"

Her face broke up into pretty, whimsical laughter.

"Why, my ideal had to be fulfilled somehow," she owned. "I had to turn round and try to be noble myself. Of course I made a botch of it,

but at least there was somebody trying. If the lookout is asleep at his post, the cabin boy may have to take a turn."

He rose and paced back and forth through the airy room. At length he turned, with the inevitable irritation of a much criticised man.

"After all," he said impulsively, "I don't see exactly what I've done. I simply haven't succeeded in literature. What have I done that is so ignoble?"

"You know," she answered quietly.

"I don't know. Tell me. Be as brutal as you like. I can stand it."

"Shall I?"

"I insist upon it."

"Very good. You are emptily cynical, epigrammatically mischievous over the homely, sweet, wholesome things of life. You are the darling of fashionable women, who pout over your abuse of their sex, make pretty wry faces, and then swallow all you say. You are the victim of fine dinners and the elaboration of civilized life. You have forsaken the patience to do the things which must be done prayerfully; you are willing to be fantastic in order to appear great. You are cultivating the vice of clever speaking and

the affectation of believing in nothing and nobody — *because it pays.*"

The moment was a galling one, and the last sentences stung like whips. They were unendurable. He stood at the window, his back to her. For the time, nothing seemed in the least important but getting out of the room with a decent degree of composure. He could take his lashing in bravado, or even a renewed cynicism, but not perhaps with dignity. And while the silence grew unbearable, her voice broke it so sweetly that he started.

"And after all, you are the dearest, most lovable soul that ever came into this perplexing world."

He turned, and came straight up to her, impulsive as a boy.

"Am I?" he asked eagerly. "Do you truly think so?"

"Dear friend," she answered sadly, "what should it profit me now to say anything I do not think? I have no longer any use for the polite fictions of life; we lay them aside when we know our shroud is making."

His eyes felt hot; he had forgotten, and he was horrified at remembering. She must have translated the feeling, for she went on quickly:

"So many people crowd about you that many must love you. You are of those who gather affection wherever they go. You see I can tell, for I knew you only three weeks, and you were afterwards so dear to me that I never quite lost you. How much more binding must it be for the people who know you better, and to whom you belong. But now you must go. I hear the nurse, and she has some peculiar idea that I am to drink things at appallingly short intervals. Good-by. Come soon. And don't dread me. I foresee that all my preaching is over. Next time you shall scarify me."

He got blindly out of the house and home again. That day his work lay untouched, and his thoughts were tumultuous. He felt as if he had been asleep for years, and that some one had awakened him, thrusting a glaring light into his face.

Next day, he was again in the sunny room.

"That's good," she said. "I thought you'd come. I knew you wouldn't keep me hungering."

The sense of absolute truth between men and women is a soul-satisfying thing. To have a woman tell you she longs for your coming and

pines in your absence may be very sweet, when she establishes no claim upon you and wishes to establish none. Again he felt warm at the heart.

"I thought about you all night," he began impulsively. "I could n't sleep."

"That's good," she repeated. "That insures me a feeling of life, life to the last. I'm glad my beaker is n't going to be all dregs."

"But you must be mistaken," he broke out hotly, in a man's impatience over a situation he can neither enter nor ameliorate. "It can't be true. You look so well: a little thin, perhaps, but well."

Her eyes rested upon him steadfastly, with much sweetness.

"I don't mean to talk about that," she said, "or think about it when you are here. I simply expect you, for the sake of old days, to give me a lot of time in the next few weeks. If you do, I shall feel very rich indeed; and somehow or other, for the last few years I've felt poor."

"Old days!" repeated Stafford, plunging, with no other preamble, into his reminiscent speculations of the night before. "I've been thinking them over. I have n't done it for years."

"I have," said the lady, smiling with such

convincing humor that it swept her words free of morbidness. "For a great many months I thought of little else. You were such a vivid experience to me. You made life glow."

Then he stumbled, with no volition of his own, into the question his saner sense forbade him.

"I wonder why I saw less of you. Why did we drift apart?"

She laughed in that low, musical contralto he remembered as one of her charms.

"I am having," she announced, "a unique experience. I am telling a man the absolute truth, without disguise, knowing I sha'n't be paid out for it in social flagellation. My dear sir, you thought I was falling in love with you. That was the reason you stopped coming."

An angry red mounted to his hair. He cursed himself inwardly for having evoked the situation.

"This is insufferable," he began stiffly, but she laughed again.

"Dear friend," said she, "don't hedge. It's perfectly true, and if you will retrace your emotions, you will own it. It's nothing to be ashamed of: only to be regretted, because it impoverished both of us. I needed you; and I

am conceited enough to fancy I might have paid my debt in kind."

John Stafford was distinctly sulky.

"A man does n't like to be accused of having made an ass of himself," he announced irrelevantly.

"And he sha'n't be," said the lady soothingly, though her eyes still laughed. "He sha'n't be. You did n't get up that little chapter of heroics ; it was only because you are a man. You are all so deliciously elementary."

"If you want to decry the sex—do !" said Stafford, rising, moving his chair with a little kick, and beginning to pace the room. "Only don't stick pins into *me*. I'm no scapegoat. So we're elementary ?"

"Divinely so. You recognize only defined relations. If I say to you, in effect, 'Dear sir, I love you,' you start like a 'timid fawn on wildwood lawn,' and shudder out, 'Lord defend us ! An instant more, and, willy-nilly, we shall find ourselves at the altar !'"

"I don't !"

"No, no, not you individually : you collectively. And then, if you are a nice boy, you swear, after the manner of Guy Livingstone and

Ouida's scented guardsmen, 'I will defend her from herself. She shall see me no more!' And thereupon you ride away, and Lady Nancy Bell sits droning over her embroidery, and wishing you 'd come back and play fair."

Stafford pushed his hands farther into his pockets and walked up to the couch ; he stood there looking at her. She was very lovely, the incarnation of her brighter self. Mirth and humor played upon her face, and she met his glance provokingly. His lips relaxed into a smile.

"I'd forgotten you were such a tease," he said. "But — did you miss me, as you say? Honest, now !"

She nodded, in a fashion both pretty and convincing.

"Awfully !" she answered.

"So we might have been friends ?"

"The best of friends."

"And no more ?"

"Not a thing. That 's enough — except once in a lifetime."

"But suppose I had grown to want more ?"

Her lips settled into the curve of a deeper seriousness. She seemed to have withdrawn within herself. He felt the change and his mistake.

"There you are again," she protested, "defining, making limitations, poking people into known corners. Can't you see the beauty of half shades?"

Glad to escape unpunished, he drew her away into the talk of the hour. He was amazed to note how burnished her mind had been kept, how keen and eager. While he had lived his life in the eyes of men, she, in her cloistered mental solitude, had been keeping vigil. He was conscious of a great pride in her; she seemed to belong to him. Suddenly he saw her not only for as fair as she was, but inestimable in that she was unique. He could not believe that the same jewel had almost lain in his hand, those years before, and that he had ever let it go. The possibility of a great happiness rose before him like a beacon-fire against the sky. He forgot what she had said of the tragedy overhanging her; the intensity of her spiritual life overbore the physical, and made her not only living but to live. He grew light-headed. When he bade her good-by there was a new meaning in his face, and his voice fell huskily. For the first time she looked a little troubled; and when he had gone, she brooded until Miss Woodman, the nurse, came in to make her rest.

"Nurse," said she, when the little white pillow had been slipped under her head, and the high silken ones withdrawn, "I'm afraid we don't escape the complications of life until we escape life itself."

"It's a chore to live," returned Miss Woodman. She loved her patient, and she knew, as John Stafford never would, that her gentleness and sweetness were the mask of pain.

Every morning Stafford sent her flowers, and soon he was thinking about them half the night before, deciding what they should be, to make themselves significant. Every afternoon he came. He put the thought of her alarming situation afar from him, with abhorrence. Even that letter had been locked away in a drawer. With a common cowardice of the mind, he fled from what might prove the truth, so to make it the more a lie. He would not recognize it. And something — was it the great impulse of happiness or real physical betterment? — endowed her with an unexpected strength. Once her mother met him in the hall as he entered. Tears were on her cheeks, but her eyes shone prayerfully.

"We think she is better," she said, giving him

both hands, though she knew him slightly. "We are beginning to take courage."

Stafford met her grasp with a heartier one. He strode into the sacred room, and up to the couch. Protest was at his lips and he could not restrain it.

"See here," he began roughly, "I won't have them calling you ill. I don't believe it. It is n't so bad as you say. You're not — so ill?"

Pity softened her eyes.

"Poor boy!" she said, "there's your tender heart. You can't bear suffering. I did n't think you'd take it so. I only thought of the pleasure you could give me; and it seemed to me, as I told you in the beginning, that you could n't possibly be hurt."

"I could n't be hurt!"

He sat down, not looking at her. His eyes did not travel above her hands, now folded hard upon each other. His face was haggard.

"Is it true?" he said at last. "How much is true?"

She answered unwillingly, and as softly as if the blow might thus be lightened:—

"They think I may live a long time. They have even persuaded my mother into some kind

of a futile hope. They say I have — perhaps — an even chance."

A groan burst from him.

"Don't!" she besought him, almost inaudibly. She bent forward and laid one fragile hand on his.

He was sick with scorn of himself, because he had forgotten her need of peace. Yet having gone so far, he could not now be merciful.

"Suppose," he said at last, when she had withdrawn her hand, "suppose everything had been different? Suppose I had stayed with you and you had loved me? Suppose now, this minute, you were my wife! What would this be to us then?"

He lifted his eyes and met his answer. A sudden radiance had flashed into her face.

"Agony," she said steadily, "but heavenly agony compared with this. We should know what it means to say *Mine*. We should defy death. We should not be afraid."

"Not of anything?" he asked quite simply, with the heart-breaking pathos of a man become a child. "Not even afraid of never meeting again?"

"Not even of that," she answered, from a

beautiful serenity which seemed now the condition of her soul. "We should know."

He stretched both hands toward her, but she withdrew a little.

"Go, now," she said with tenderness. "I can't listen to you any more. You are sick with sympathy. I won't answer anything you don't say sanely. Go away and think. To-morrow you may want to come again."

He went out of the room without touching her hand; but on the stairs he paused and then returned to her.

"Edith!" he said. "Edith!"

She looked at him with an open tenderness and a certain holy dwelling upon him which he had never seen in her before.

"You are sure?" he asked hesitatingly, "you are sure we need n't lose each other?"

"Sure!" she answered, with the same indwelling smile. "There might be absence, parting — such a big universe, you know! — but not loss."

That night John Stafford lay awake many hours, looking into the darkness of his chamber, and saying over and over, "How strange it is! how strange!" His life had swept into another

cycle. He seemed to himself not so much oppressed by tragedy and loss, as distinctly enriched through them. He had found his mate, and this time he knew her. He saw into the vista of time. His soul ranged herself on the side of obedience. He had inherited.

The next afternoon was dazzling with the brightness of a crystal sky and the light upon the snow. When he took his usual way to his tryst, sunshine flooded all the streets and seemed to make some claim of answering joy. Long before he got there, his eyes, keener than usual, like all his senses, detected the fluttering of white ribbon from the bell. They had tied a bunch of violets there. He turned about and walked back through the sunlight. Aimlessly he began pulling off his gloves : yet not quite aimlessly, perhaps, because it was necessary, at the moment, to have something to do. He swayed a little as he walked ; once or twice he jostled the passers-by, and they looked at him curiously. Yet he was exalted and not in despair ; not only the earth but some unprobed state of being seemed to him very warm and real.



**THE BOOK OF LOVE**



## THE BOOK OF LOVE

IN September the marshes at Sedgmoor were all a golden shimmer, flushed here and there with patches of blood-red samphire. The summer colors were nothing to these : the brilliant sky, the blue water of the river, and the brown and yellow of ripened grass. The river flowed down between Red Island and the shore ; and twice a day the tide swept back and forth, leaving wide lagoons to reflect the sky, and then flooding them again with its own wavering blue. The road to the island led over a little bridge between skirting amplitudes of marsh, and the island itself was made of red sand, beaten upon by the waves of the outer sea. But opposite the island, with only the river between them, stood the old gray shingled house in a waste of barren land. Within, on this cold night, an unseasonable night for the early fall, it was all warmth and comfort of a simple sort. There were sweeping red curtains beside the windows, and the fire leaped hotly, seeming to burn up something in

the air, and to return the hungrier for what it fed on. A long table in the middle of the room was laden with orderly piles of papers, and at one side of it sat John Graham, at work on his anthology. He was a gaunt, muscular man approaching middle age by a tranquil road. His fine profile was that of some old miniature, modernized by the close mustache. His gray eyes were deeply set, and his dark hair showed a little white at the temples. The woman on the other side of the table sat very still, her head poised on her hand, her eyes fixed on some slips of paper before her. Yet from time to time she glanced briefly up at him, with the effect of effacing herself for some worthy motive. She was pale, though healthily so, with riches of brown hair. There were subtile meanings about her eyes and the corners of her delicate mouth. She gave the impression of being very well, of being related to wholesome things, kin to fire and water, bread and apples, and all the elements most immediate to life. She was Elinor, his sister's friend ; and his sister lay on the sofa in the dusk by the tall clock, regarding the two with comprehending eyes. Sally, the sister, was older than the others, and looked it. She was

colorless, her hair turning relentlessly gray; but her eyes reflected the changing light of her mind. They were quizzical in their alert intelligence.

"There, John," said she presently, "you've worked long enough. Talk."

The other two looked up, the man with a smile, Elinor smiling also, but with the air of saying "Hush!" She wore a veiled suggestion of standing by the man, shielding him, his leisure, his comfort, even from his sister. The sister knew that, and reflected upon it, with an extreme tenderness for them both. John shuffled his papers, and then pushed back the lock of hair unweariedly tumbling over his forehead. He looked across the table at Elinor, and her face lighted brilliantly in answer. Well-poised creature as she was, she had the air of being willing to wait indefinitely for notice, as if her pride turned to humility with him.

"Talk," repeated Sally impatiently. "You do get so dull, you two, over that work. I wish it were done."

"Don't say that," said Elinor impulsively. "When it's done and you're well, Sally, I must go back to town. I wrote uncle this morning."

"Has he sent for you?" asked the man quickly.

She smiled at him in swift response.

"No, not exactly. He only mentioned that I came to make Sally a visit in May, and that it's now September. He said he might go abroad in October, and that I'd better make up my mind to go with him."

"Oh, no!" said Graham hurriedly, and Sally smiled to herself.

"But you've written him why you stayed," she said.

"Oh, yes! I wrote him. I told him you had a carriage accident, and Mr. Graham has an anthology, and that when you both get over them, I'll go back. I've represented myself as most important. I said I was needed."

"You are needed," declared Graham.

"Well, it'll be over soon enough," mused Sally, her eyes now on her brother's face. "I've almost got my strength again. We shall close the house, the winds will beat upon it, the tide will fret the sand; we shall go back to New York, and you'll be off to Europe. Ah, well!" She rose and left the room, limping slightly, and they settled down anew in their places.

"Shall I number those?" asked Elinor, stretching out a hand toward the pile of slips before him.

He shook his head and made futile marks with a pencil.

"Are you really going to Europe?" he asked, in a low tone.

Elinor, at the moment when his sister left the room, had seemed to gain a new sedateness, as if it were a veil between her and the man.

"It's a chance," she owned, "a possibility."

"You see," he continued, "this has gone on so long — well, you are one of us, you know."

"It has been very pleasant," she returned conventionally. But the pupils of the brown eyes widened.

"You are such a reasonable woman," he broke forth, as if he made confession.

She drew a quick breath, and leaned forward slightly across the table. Now she also took a pencil and began making little marks.

"What do you mean by a reasonable woman?" she asked, in a tone of tranquil interest.

He had no difficulty in telling her. Things were quite apparent to him when they were apparent at all. He looked across at her brightly, with that smile which made him seem accessible, abounding in promises he could and would fulfill.

"Why," said he, "you are like a man. Don't mistake me. Your limits include the perfect feminine. You are a charming woman. But you are the only woman who seems to me entirely reasonable in her habit of life. Sally, now! I adore Sally, but she's full of subtleties and withholdings. I couldn't get along without Sally, but, bless me! we don't speak the same language. And—I was engaged to a woman once. I was mighty uncomfortable."

"When it was broken?"

"No; while it was in progress. We didn't accord. I was a commonplace chap, just as I am now. She was all emotion. That's what I mean when I contrast her with you and call you reasonable. You could lead a man's life, all work and no play. You've got work of your own."

"Yes," agreed Elinor, rather listlessly, "I have work of my own."

"What I mean is, you would n't let the course of life be broken by tempests, jealousies, emotions. You would n't row if a man forgot to send you roses, or nag him into writing every day."

"Oh, dear, no!" said Elinor brightly. "If I'd got to have the roses, I should expect them from some man who did remember."

This was not quite the logical sequence as Graham saw it.

"Yes, of course," he concurred. "Only, I mean if a man said he cared about you, that would be the end of it. You wouldn't expect vain repetition. Why, don't you know how reasonable you are?"

Elinor looked at him for an instant as if her mind made a perceptible pause before a leap into some new position. Then she took her leap, and did it gallantly.

"Yes, let us assume that I am reasonable."

A log in the fireplace fell gently, with the effect of easing itself. Graham leaned back in his chair and began talking, as if he let his mind loose luxuriously.

"I have n't spoken of that girl for years — the girl I was engaged to. I suppose I was in love with her. It passed for that. But even now I think of her with such irritation — Well, I can't describe it to you. Elinor" —

Her face ignored this new usage of her name ; none the less, she was throbbingly conscious of it.

"Elinor, she invaded me. She insisted on my keeping up all kinds of petty worship and observances — I can't describe it to you

could n't do it. I 've got to be I, if I do take a wife." He was even husky and querulous in his perplexity.

"Yes," said Elinor soothingly, "yes, of course you 've got to be you."

"We quarreled." There was a reminiscent glee upon his face. "I don't remember what it was about. Actually I don't. But I was so relieved. She dismissed me. I felt like a boy let out of school." He looked at her in whimsical apology. "I ought to have been ashamed. I was n't. I could n't be. I 'm not now. I wanted my walking-papers, that was all. And I'd got 'em!" He rubbed his hands in a joy so irrepressible that again she smiled.

"What about her?" she asked — "the woman? Was she glad?"

"She thought not, for a while," he said, with the frankness of one to whom simplicity of statement makes the thing itself quite simple. "She was rather pale, and they took her away to the sea. But in a year she married, and now Sally says she wears jet prematurely. But I don't know what that indicates."

Elinor looked him in the face with the air of accepting a part.

"So be it," said she. "I am reasonable. What then?"

"Why, then," he resumed, a trace of heat in his manner — "then I want to ask you" —

She was not ready. Her apparent mood changed as a flaw runs over the waves.

"Don't ask me anything," she said, dominating him briefly — "anything to take thought. I have a plan of my own."

He was ingenuously disconcerted. Through these weeks of changing summer weather she had betrayed neither moods nor desires. She had simply, as a visitor, shown a genius for fitting in. There was no hint of an irritating abnegation in that attitude; she merely seemed to be interested in life as others wanted it, to an extent that brightened it into vividness and pleasure.

"I am going," said she, "to write a story : to be called 'The Book of Love.'"

"When did you think of it? Just now, at this moment?"

A shade of withdrawal passed over her face. It suggested that she might have little confidences with herself alone.

"Oh, I've thought of it off and on! It is the

story of a man and his wife. She has to express herself. He is inarticulate. She thinks married life is the expansion of courtship. She disconcerts him. He meant to provide her with house and lands and suitable amusements, to cleave to her and his business. She is looking forward to romance every day. He is terrified."

Graham was regarding her with open suspicion.

" You have n't got that out of the story I just told you ? " he asked. " About the girl—and me ? "

" Oh no ! " said she demurely. " That may have reminded me, but it 's a situation I 've come upon before. Your case is not an isolated one. The wife is n't a sentimentalist, mind you. She 's a solid, sane woman, with moving blood and a tendency to worship. And she worships this man."

Graham shook his head.

" Oh ! " said he. " I begin to be sorry for him. Women must n't worship. Men must n't either. They must form an equable partnership, and carry on their mutual work. Otherwise — well, I 've been shipwrecked, and I know."

He was staring moodily into the fire, and she could caress him with that maternal look, half indulgence, half tenderness, which certain women give to men who seem to them like children, only a little dearer.

"True," said she soberly, "and our woman found that out. And because she loved the man, she resolved to become something different. But she could n't. None of us can. We can only turn our vices into tools to work with."

"But she could n't make herself over," he dissented hopelessly. "You own that."

"Oh yes, she could — outside! And he came home to dinner every night, and found an admirable soup, and just the kind of wife he wanted to serve it."

"I don't like that man. He seems selfish."

"No, no! He was a dear good fellow. He was working for her all day long. Only he did n't know she had her little hungers that could have been satisfied as easily as playing a game of fox and geese. The fox and geese might have bored him, but it would n't have taken very long."

"But the Book of Love?"

"Oh, I forgot! Well, you see there was a big

tract in life, according to her fancy, and they'd only begun to explore it when courting-time was over. And now she didn't dare to go there after dark, there were such beguiling things: only they were not real. The apples looked like apples, but they turned into dust on the lips — not ashes, but a light, fragrant dust that is less than nothing. There were beautiful dances, but the dancers were hollow like hill-wives. There were faithful fires always burning, but no one could warm his hands at them. There were little whispers that told nothing, for certain whispers must be heard by two; and there were flowers everywhere. But the flowers had no smell."

"But why? why?" asked the man. He spoke like a child, and indeed he felt like one. For her voice, with its smooth singing quality, had gone on as if she told a fairy-story, and the room, the glancing fire, and even he and she seemed a little unreal. They might have been the man and woman in the Book of Love.

"Because," said Elinor, "the woman was made to live in a House of Love, where two creatures together build up something imperishable. I mean something out of the spirit of life, which is more real than life itself. But the man

did n't know there was such a house, and the woman had to live in it alone. And that is unfortunate. The house gathers mould and ghosts."

"Did n't he love her?"

"Very much. But I can't explain any more. Enter, the Book of Love. The woman got very lonesome. That untamed soul inside her beat against its bars, and suffered horribly. From a kind of hunger, you know. She could not help telling him she loved him, and to him repetitions were superfluous. She was a part of him, bone of his bone. His own bones did not need antiphonal pæans. And so — it's very simple — the woman got a book, and set down in it all the things she wanted to say to the man and could n't. It was the journal of their pilgrimage together — only seen from the inside and not the outside, as he saw it."

"And he found the journal?"

"Yes, I think he found it. But only after she had died."

"So he realized he never had known her at all."

"Oh, he'd known all he wanted! She never deceived him. She was candor itself, so far as

she went. Only when he came home at night, instead of saying, 'I'm glad—glad—glad to see you!' she said: 'Oh, I've had such fun to-day! Want to hear about it?'"

"But *had* she had fun?"

"Not particularly. Only it pleased him to think so."

"I don't know whether I like that woman," mused Graham gloomily.

"Oh, well, if you don't, then you don't like any woman! Only not all of them write a book."

Here Sally came back, and after an interlude of idle talking Elinor left the room. The brother and sister sat silent for a moment, and then Graham remarked,—

"Sally, I've been telling Elinor she is a perfectly reasonable woman."

"Oh," said Sally with cordial interest, "how pleased she must have been!"

"And yet she seems to understand the other kind of woman too. But she is reasonable, is n't she? Like a man!"

"Oh, you dear fool!" murmured Sally to the ceiling.

"What did you say, dear?" asked her brother solicitously.

"Nothing, dear. Only we might have a snack of bread and cheese before we go to bed."

The next day began the writing of the Book of Love. Elinor sat at her side of the table, while Graham delved at his; she bent over her paper in deep absorption. He found himself watching her, from time to time, and then restraining lest she be disquieted. But she had no eyes for him. The delicate antennæ of her mind were stretching forth toward something quite outside his field of vision; and that mental isolation half bewildered him. She worked only when Sally was taking her daily nap, or writing letters in the room above. Sally's naps were longer now than they had been, her letter-writing more copious. Once Elinor flew upstairs in a tempest of remorse, and swooped down upon her where she sat happily by the window, her idle hands upon her lap.

"Oh, Sally," said she contritely, "you must n't stay away because I'm writing!"

Sally did not combat the reason. They had long ago dropped civil platitudes.

"I like to, dear," she answered. "You can write better down there."

Neither of them counted the man when they

thought of solitude. They both knew the double ease of being with him, his fine, still presence.

So the Book of Love went on from day to day, and Graham kept the silence of one who reverences a growing work. Elinor grew paler, and her hair, pushed back by that impatient hand, left her forehead careworn. That touched some unrecognized spring of tenderness in him, and one night, while they were working by the fire, he spoke. But it was not until he had stretched a hand across the table and laid it on the page she was regarding that he saw fine, anxious lines upon her face.

"You are tiring yourself," he said.

She looked up quickly, and seemed to throw aside some veiling thought. Here was her old frank self.

"I am tired," she owned, "but not of this. I could write and write. It need never be finished. It leads everywhere."

"I wish I could hear some of it," he said wistfully. He had a great reverence for work spun out of the brain. It made him shy.

"Oh, you shall!" said Elinor, at once. "It may not mean anything to you. It's a little letter to women. And the women themselves

might be angry because it betrays too much; only they 'll know men — real men — don't speak that language. I 'll read you a bit here and there."

Whereupon she began reading, quite gravely and impersonally, as if the story belonged to some one else: . . . "At first I meant to write this book so that you might some time see it and know what was in my heart. But that would hamper me. I should grow self-conscious. So you shall never read the book, but I shall write it, like a letter, exactly as if you were to read it. I shall say You. It is so strange to live with you ! I never get used to it. This dual consciousness, this incessant, unspoken interchange ! When I first knew you, the fact of you walked like a ghost and broke my rest. My eyes would fly open at three o'clock in the dark spring dawnings, and my spirit would stare back almost affrighted at what called her. Then I would lie late into the morning, tasting the certainty that you were alive, and that it meant something quite unlike what it could mean to any one else, save perhaps your mother. I have mused over her holy vigils before you were born. She thought of her son. I think of my lover. To both of us

he is a man-child. And the thought of you still starts awake beside me, like the preluding note of your presence. We are in the same house. I hear your voice, I see the look on your face ; yet beyond and beyond all that is the subtle atmosphere of you, like the breath of your soul, like an aura. The unseen phantom of you walks beside me all day long.'"

"That is very strange," said Graham. "You probe too far. These are mysteries."

But Elinor sifted the pages and went on reading : "'We live together, yet really we each live alone. It terrifies me. This is true, at least : that I must live alone because you don't often care to come into my garden ; and I watch you so hard to see what you want, that I think I shall always hear and come into yours when you call me. There is such an overplus in mine — weeds, flowers, sweet-smelling, strong-smelling ! I don't wonder you lose your way. But yours is a green field, with coverts for shade and springs where we need them. So I shall visit you there, though really I must live alone. When I first found that out, it seemed like not living at all. Then I said it is a part of my acquiescence, a part of your rights, the rights I accord you of

my own glad will. Since that I have had my secrets from you. I think the reason chiefly is that I want to leave you free.' ”

“ What does she mean by that ? ”

“ She tells on the next page. ‘ Do you remember, in courting-time, how I moved from the back of the house to the front, so that I could see you when you went by to work, to your sister’s, back and forth a dozen times a day ? I told you, and then I saw that I had conjured up a duty for you. You went past when it was not the nearest way. You were pathetically anxious to explain the times when it was impossible to go. So I moved back again. After that I had my little secrets. I wanted you to be free.’ ”

“ But what kind of secrets ? ”

“ Oh, ultra-foolish things, done only by dottards or women in love ! Stroking his coat when she found it hanging in the hall, adoring his glove because it kept the shape of his hand, writing him letters and tearing them up. Heavens ! don’t ask *me* ! But here she begins to see ghosts : —

“ ‘ I am lonesome. I am almost afraid. When we first knew each other, I thought that spark, struck out in the darkness, would light the world.

It did not go out. You love me. *But it does not light the world.* In the first days you were like a strong spirit, radiant, on fire. Shall you never be that again? The flower cannot open twice, but I thought the plant would bloom and bloom.'"

"I call this a kind of divine nonsense!" said Graham, his mind at bay.

"So it is. I can't abide her myself. She's a whimperer. I hoped to make her flesh and blood."

"Never mind. Go on!"

. . . "We women are children, dear. So are you, only you are a different kind. We have to be assured, reassured, warmed, soothed, and tended. We cannot take things for granted. You must tell us even the deep things more than once—there are such timorous fibres in us, such hurrying pulses. If you were walking in the dark with me, and I said, "I am afraid!" you would speak to me. You would take my hand and treat me tenderly. Dear, do not let me be afraid.'

. . . "Your fighting is done out in the world. Our warfare is chiefly of the heart. Do not forget that. We are very strong in patience and endurance—yet very weak.'

. . . "I am setting in order my remembrances of the first days of love. They are packed away to be taken out when we are old, to muse on by the fire. The young will think: "She has had her day. It is all over for her, and we are beginning." But they will be wrong. It will not be over. While we sit there, I at my knitting, you at your book, my wise little soul will have gone away into her own house where no one enters. She will have spread her table and eaten her sacramental bread. She will remember.'

. . . "Sometimes I think if I were more beautiful, more compelling, I could draw you away from the appearance of things to what seem to me the things themselves. I do not mean more beautiful in body. I mean some lustre of the mind so fine you must perceive it.'

. . . "You said the other day I wanted life to be lived on tiptoe. Perhaps I do. I want it to be vivid, fragrant. We are here for so short a time. Even youth is short.'"

"Tell me," said Graham, stopping her by a finger on her sleeve, "are women always unhappy?"

She sat still, acutely conscious of him and the hand he had forgotten. Suddenly she looked

older, like a woman thrilled by emotions that burn to the centre, waste the heart and brain, and yet, being most vital, renew them gloriously.

"Unhappy?" she repeated. "Many of them are not — reasonable."

A little smile quivered upon her lips, and now she looked at him. He forgot their talk, thinking only of her face.

"You are tired," he said. "Let the story go. Let anything go. Only don't look like that."

"It's the story," said she. "I've been thinking so hard. I am trying now to see how this woman can surmount the hostility between the male and female. She can surmount it, you see, because she is imaginary. We can make her as potent as we please.

. . . "I thought there was harmony between us, and that only. There is warfare, everlasting strife. We are like two adoring, fighting souls bound in one flesh. We are drawn irresistibly, and yet every fibre of our inheritance pushes us apart. In the beginning, you pursued. When I stopped long enough to see who it was that followed, I recognized you and I stayed. As soon as you found me irrevocably yours, you lost some vividness of pleasure. You had me; you missed

the chase. At that point some women play a game. They pretend the chase may still continue. With you I can pretend to nothing. When life grows keen like this, sharp in the nostrils, big as the heavens, there ceases to be a game. Would you have the priest neglect the fire on the altar so that the worshiper may see it newly lighted? Nay, the fire shall be always there, so long as these hands can tend it. There shall be no trickery.'

. . . "But it is true: I am not significant to you, now I am with you every day. If my highest note responds inevitably to yours, you do not call me. Surely you do not understand. You think I am attained. Dear, I am not attained. The soul is a growing creature. She is august. Cherish her, and she will repay you a thousand-fold. Repulse her, drive her into fastnesses, and though you see her semblance, you see her no more. She will give all she can. You may not even guess you lose her — but she may be lost.'

. . . "One of us two must yield. The tie between us can only be welded by one great compromise. It shall be mine. The woman is more plastic. Let her bend her nature to his need. It shall be mine, dear. I do it gladly.'

"Then after a long time she writes :—  
. . . “I begin to understand your silences. I understand all silence. Our spirits talk together in spite of us. I laughed aloud the other day, for I learned the secret of old married life. We see some ancient man and woman sitting by the fire, exchanging now and then a word or smile. They look benignantly at youth, and youth sees envy in the glance. That silence between them is ineffable. They have outgrown the need of speech ; and by and by, when one leaf flutters down, the other opens its withered, trembling grasp and flutters after. They know what they know.’

“I hate that woman !” she cried. “Don’t you see how she has got away from me ? I intended to make the book a record of a hidden love, and it shifts into a disquisition on the eternal difference between men and women. The husband shall see the book. It won’t hurt him, for he ’ll find her out. She’s a self-conscious prig, and he ’ll be glad he ’s rid of her. I ’ll kill her off. She shall go down to the island to moon on a stormy night, and walk off the little bridge.”

But there were tears in her eyes. She loved the woman, it was plain, only she was a little

ashamed of the predicament wherein she found herself with all womankind. Graham was regarding her somewhat wistfully.

"I wonder," he hesitated, "if I 've been wrong,—if what I 've thought was lack of reason in women is really something big and fundamental, something worthy to be fed? Have I been wrong?"

If he had asked Sally that question, she would have cried satirically, "Wrong? Dear me, no! That is n't possible."

But Elinor had nothing but gentleness for him, a tenderness matching her comprehension of him, the simplicity that, in the midst of his manhood, kept him still a child.

"We don't understand each other any too well," she said, "men and women. As for us—the women—those deep, appalling fountains of affection in us are all used. They are the springs that feed our life. Out of them motherhood is made, great patience, infinite service. Oh no, it is n't wasted!"

"I wish," said Graham haltingly, "you would teach me these things."

She trembled a little, and as he looked at her it seemed to him that she was suddenly cold and unresponsive.

He went on, "I can't imagine your going away. I want you to stay. I want you to marry me."

Her lips were tight. They made a thin pink line, and changed her face incredibly. "I am afraid"—she said gently. "It is only fair to tell you"—

"No, no!" he besought her in haste. "There is n't anybody else?"

"I don't mean that."

"Then think of it, consider it. Please! It seems like a great presumption, because I don't know anything about the things you know. Love—even the sound of it troubles me. But I would be good to you. I would not let you be sorry."

"I know! I know! Still, you don't quite—read me. You say I am a reasonable woman"—

"It is your wonderful charm."

"But there are some things no woman can take in a reasonable way. This is one. It is a very big thing. We women think it is the biggest thing in the world. And it presupposes—great love."

The man got up and paced the floor back and forth. His face was white, his lips were trembling. When he spoke, his voice shook.

"Dear," he said, "I don't understand those things. I honestly don't. It's a big word — love. I'm afraid of it. I'm not afraid of you. You seem as immediate to me as my own hand. But that word and all it seems to imply — I don't know anything about it. I can't deceive you. I can't swear it. I can't."

He was greatly moved. He seemed to himself to be failing in some terrible challenge. Yet he must not fail.

"No," she said gently. "Of course you can't. You sha'n't swear anything."

"It seems insulting to you," he went on tremulously. "You are bigger, more wonderful than anything I ever imagined. I am afraid of you; yet you are so dear that I am not afraid of you at all. There's nobody like you, nobody. I should try so hard — all my life — to make you happy."

He looked like a boy, like the little old photograph his sister had upstairs. Once when Elinor was alone in the room with the picture, she had put it against her cheek. Some flooding impulse made her remember that now. She rose hastily.

"We must n't talk," she said. "We are friends, you know, the best of friends. Good-night."

"You can't do it?" he asked. "You can't consider it?"

"Don't say I can't do it. *We* can't do it. I could n't let you marry my kind of woman, no matter how innocuous she might seem. For if she did n't turn out so reasonable after all — why, there'd have to be some little spark of madness in you to help you understand it. That sort of madness is a wonderful illuminator of dark corners."

She said good-night again in her old frank way, and he watched her up the stairs. He stayed very late that night over the fire, pondering about love as it seemed to other men. But he could not compass it. They evidently meant something which looked to him very simple ; and yet they had agreed to tangle it in a net of words.

The next morning Elinor came late to breakfast, and found at her plate a letter calling her back to town. She handed it to Sally without a look of comment. They two were alone, for Graham, with some irresistible disquietude upon him, was walking to the island, to get his blood in tune for the day's work. Sally read the letter, and passed it back.

"Well," she said, "I suppose it had to come some time. But I hoped"—

She stopped there, and Elinor made haste to speak. "I might as well take the morning train," said she.

So when Graham came back from the island he found luncheon ready, a shining house, such houses as are made for men who are much prized, but only Sally at the table.

"Elinor has gone," said she, when she found him pausing over the fish.

"Gone? Where?"

"Her uncle sent for her. He's very much hypped."

"Well, what of it? What does he want of *her*?"

"Oh, I don't know! What do we want of her? Elinor's an incurable habit, once you get used to her."

Graham stared at his plate, and then fell to and ate large quantities of luncheon. But he did not settle himself to work that afternoon. Sally saw him walking up and down the water-front where the sedge is glorious, his hands behind his back. She smiled, and then sighed. It often seemed to her that people lost incalculably, in life, through lack of brain.

But that evening he took quite patiently to his papers, and Sally, lying on her sofa, read a novel intermittently and watched him.

"What are you reading?" he asked her suddenly, in a pause of shuffling manuscript. She showed him the paper-covered book. "How can you waste your time over trash like that?" he ended fractiously. Sally had hardly seen him cross since he was a boy, and her heart ached for him.

"It's life," she said gently. "These are real people."

"I suppose they fall in love?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Break their hearts over it?"

"Approximately."

"Pshaw!" He took up his pen and began to write. Presently he threw it down again, and went to kick a log into place. "I wish chimneys could be made to draw," he said savagely. "I hate a sulking fire." But while he spoke, the flames were bellowing up and Sally smiled. Yet the next instant she caught a little sigh, and whispered to herself, "Poor boy!"

He came back to his place, and she sank into her reading.

"Sally," said he, "what if we should go back to town?"

She blew him a noiseless kiss, but her tone told nothing.

"I thought you wanted to spend the winter here."

"I did, but — somehow it's all different. I suppose it's the frost in the air. I can't work here. I want to get into my own study. Look at this lamp, even!" It was a shining splendor of good care. "A man can't work under such conditions."

Sally laid down her book and folded her hands upon it.

"I fancied," she said, rather indifferently, "I might like to wait to hear from Elinor. If she is going abroad, I'll hurry back to town. If they're not going, it might be she'd come here and stay awhile. I asked her."

"You did? Oh, well, very well, then!" He settled himself cosily to work. "There! the fire's burning now."

It was three days before a letter came from Elinor, and then she knew no more about her prospects than before. The letter itself was vaguely unsatisfying, and after Sally had read

it aloud, Graham sat still, his legs stretched out to the fire.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Yes, that's all."

He got up and walked to the door. There he paused a moment, his great shoulders bent a little under some unseen weight. Sally was pitifully moved for him, he looked so hurt and sorry.

"When you write," said he, "ask her if she has finished the Book of Love."

"What's that? — the story where the woman breaks her heart because her husband won't make love to her?"

Graham regarded her for a moment with eyes grown dark in wonder. He came back and sat down, viewing her with an unwinking curiosity. "Is that how it struck you?" he inquired.

"Why, yes!" said Sally carelessly. "I thought that was the gist of it."

Graham got up and strode out of doors. He did not stop until he was face to face with the waves rolling in on Red Island. Even they seemed to him less tumultuous than the affairs of men.

Elinor referred to his question about the Book of Love, but rather impersonally, so that he

could hardly decide whether the answer were intended for him alone.

"No, I have not finished the story," she wrote. "You see, I've got to kill off the woman, and I don't know how to do it. I want her to fall off the little Red Island bridge, but I never fell off a bridge myself, and I can't tell how it seems. Some stormy night, maybe, I shall take the train to Sedgmoor, and walk down to the bridge and do the act. It's very shallow there, you know. Then I'll come splashing to your door, to be dried off."

"Do you think she meant that?" asked Graham suddenly, a half hour after Sally had read him the letter.

"What?"

"About going down to the bridge in a storm, and tumbling off."

"Oh, I dare say!" said Sally carelessly. "She's equal to it."

It happened soon after this that the hunter's moon came and bewitched the nights. They were like a more enchanting day, and so clear and warm that Sally covered herself close and lay in a steamer chair on the piazza for hours, enraptured with the time. Then a miracle hap-

pened. Suddenly the sea began roaring so loud and so continuously that the sound came sweeping from Red Island over the river's mouth to the mainland, and clamored at the door. There was a weirdness about its great disquiet, because there seemed to be no accompanying cause. The moon was clear in a cloudless heaven ; there was no breeze. Yet the water roared without cessation, booming and breaking on the shore. The first night nobody in the house could sleep. Next day one of the fishermen talked stolidly about a storm at sea, and still the clamor was unabated. On the third night Graham looked hollow-eyed and haggard.

"Has it kept you awake ?" Sally asked him in a hushed voice, when they rose from their dinner table. He nodded without speaking, and the lines in his face contracted as if all the accustomed incidents of life might hurt him now. He got his coat, and Sally knew where he was going. She had driven down to Red Island that day, to see the waves, and she hated the powerlessness of her state ; she longed to go again to be deafened by that turmoil in the dark. There was a hush in the air of the house, like the strangeness of the night. Something was going

to happen, and it stirred her blood to know he scented it as well as she.

Graham struck out sharply along the sandy road. The moon was regnant in a crystal sky. In that flooding splendor he felt alone as he had never felt before. The rote of the sea called to him and made him the more desolate. He was bereft, undone, in a universe once filled with life, but now darkly hostile to him. He knew at last what seemed to him the wrong of being : to have been made to run inexorably in one narrow groove, and yet with eyes to see on either side the greater joys of others, even their greater tragedies. So he went on to the little bridge where the tide comes laving in, and where it lay that night in pools, responsive in strange glitterings to the moon. The thought of Elinor had ached at his heart all day. Now it grew so keen that there were tears upon his cheeks. And strangely enough, they did not seem to be tears, but the wash of the wide sea, calling and calling beyond Red Island and making all things one. He understood the grief of creatures who know their mates too late, only to lose them. He shrank from the alien desolation of the universe when one strange yet poignantly familiar soul was not beside him in it.

From the other end of the little bridge she came to meet him, in her big hat, her thick dark cloak. She walked up to him, and he saw her face, pale, yet somehow luminous in that silver shower. Instantly he thought of paradise as saints have pictured it, dim shores where our beloved come to meet us and every breath is balm. But all he could say was this :—

“What made you come ?”

“The storm. The sea. Sally’s letter told me how it roared.”

It was all like an ineffable dream without words. Graham put out his hands, and she as freely gave him hers. Then in that instant their cheeks had touched, their lips, and the great currents of unseen life had mingled.

“I can’t talk about it,” said the man.

“No,” said the woman. “I don’t want you to.”

“But if you knew”— Some natural dumbness gripped him and he paused. “Hear it,” he said, “the sea !” They listened, with one pulse. “But why are you down here, after all ?” he asked.

“I came on the late train. I got to the house while you were at dinner, and I looked in at the

window. I could n't go in. I was too glad. So I came down here and wished for you to come. I called you."

"I heard you, dear. I heard you, Elinor!"

A fierce breath tore the word in two, and the woman put up her hands and laid them gently about his neck. She was smiling and crying a little in that way women have, and she spoke with great tenderness.

"Oh, little son ! don't try to make love. Do you want me to live with you ? I will. You said I was a reasonable woman. I am. Come home to Sally now."

Sally did not say very much when the two walked in. She hardly dared. There was a bewildering air of life and light and power about them, and she had a deep respect for denizens of brighter worlds.

Elinor put away her cloak and hat, and went about as if she were no guest, but rather the spirit of the home. She asked for something to eat, and got it herself, because the maid was out ; and she set a plate before Graham, and made him drink from her cup, while he looked at her with shining eyes. When they had eaten, they sat down by the fire together, and talked

about staying all winter and finishing the anthology.

"How about the woman in the Book of Love?" asked Sally from the doorway, on her way to bed. "You killed her off, of course!"

Elinor's face flashed into a great beauty of heat and color.

"No," said she. "I let her live."

THERE AND HERE



## THERE AND HERE

PERHAPS Ruth Hollis was no more conscious at one time than another of her loneliness and heart-hunger for Rosamond Ware, the friend of her childhood, and indeed her entire life. It was an ever-present pain—not poignant now, but grown into that emptiness of loss which attends a broken kinship. Ruth had lived for her thirty-one years in the standstill, colonial-flavored town of Devonport. Rosamond, on the death of her father, mother and two brothers, in the space of a week, had gone to Italy to be with an older brother, a man with a jangled body and a tempered artist soul. That had not been altogether desirable, for the very fineness of his nature imposed its limitations, and he exacted much, even while he gave. She had been there eight years, from month to month prophesying her return, but never being quite able to effect it. Her unwilling feet would not drag themselves back to America. She longed for it, she brooded over shivered associations with a passionate regret;

but when the moment came for clasping the lax link again, cowardice shot up in her and cried off. Her grief was poignant enough already ; when she thought of voluntarily sharpening its edge, the apprehensive nerves rebelled. The house at Devonport had been given her by will, and now it was standing exactly as the family tragedy had left it. The unworn garments in the closets could hardly fall more absolute prey to mice and moth ; they were in ruins already. But daily the dust and mildew of time wrote a sadder record on the blurring page, and the inexorable master of all spurred himself to show what havoc he could compass, left to his own will. Again and again Ruth wrote her friend, begging her to have the house opened, aired, and cleaned : not for the sake of thrift only, she urged, but because the place was dear to both of them. There they had played together at mimic living, and loved and dreamed after living began. It was her home too, according to spiritual tenure, and she had a right to speak. But Rosamond always answered, "Not yet !" Time had rent her web of life, and she was still too selfish to enlarge the rift made in the nature of things.

One late twilight, in an ice-bound spring, Ruth

was wandering about the rooms of her own home, setting them in order by an observant touch here and there, and making ready to close the house for the night. The rest of the family had gone, on sudden summons, to spend a day or two with an uncle, twenty miles away, whose prodigal son had come home, and who thus bade all his accessible kin to the rejoicing. Ruth, for no tangible reason, had been disinclined to go; as the day drew nearer, her unwillingness increased, and at the very last she refused entirely, promising to spend the night and the next day with Aunt Barnard, a mile's distance out of the town. The two maids, having been given holiday, had already fastened their domain and departed. Ruth meant every minute to follow them; but the house so wooed her in its simmering afternoon warmth that she still lingered and dallied with her purpose. The fires were dying safely down, but there was a red glow in every room. The scented geraniums were sweet from the windows, and the stillness seemed benignant. At length, unable to conjure up more excuses for idling, she did get on her hat and cloak, and stood fastening the last button before the front window, where the snow lay dead white, and the

great chestnut-tree stretched gaunt arms against the darkening blue. She stopped, with an arrested motion, in putting on her gloves. Some one was coming. It was a woman, walking very fast yet lightly, with a buoyant motion Ruth seemed to know. She wore a flowing cloak, and a great hat with a long feather. Ruth watched her with a tightening at her throat and a straining of the eyes. She came nearer, stopped, and waved her hand. It was growing dark so fast that a tangible veil seemed falling between them ; but Ruth was sure she smiled.

"Rose!" she called wildly from the window.  
"Rosamond! Rosamond!"

The woman nodded. Ruth tore out of the front door, dropping her gloves behind her, and ran down the path. Now the newcomer was laughing, and Ruth felt a sudden passionate relief at the sweet familiarity of the sound. She began to see, in that instant, what her loneliness had been. She sobbed a little.

"I don't believe it," she whispered. "You are not really *you*!"

"That's your impudence," said Rosamond.  
"As if I'd take the trouble to be anybody else!"

They were walking into the house together,

side by side and hand in hand. Ruth never knew whether they had kissed or not. It was quite likely they had not, for Rosamond was an elusive creature, who held that there are few moments when the soul is the better for the body's sacrament. Inside, the dark had fallen thick.

"Let me get a lamp," said Ruth, again with a little sob of joy completed. "I want to see you."

"No, Grandmother Wolf, not to-night. You're going over to the house with me."

Ruth turned back from the table and let her match burn out.

"Not to-night, dear," she entreated. "It's cold. It's—awful. You would break your heart."

"Ah, say yes!" coaxed Rosamond, in her old spoiled fashion. "Just to step inside and see whether we want to stay. Just to peep in. Why, Ruth, it's *home!*"

But while she spoke she was at the door, and Ruth was following her, saying martyrwise:—

"You'll have your way, of course. It's to be expected; but I do wish you would n't. Wait till morning, Rose. Only till the fires are built."

Rosamond laughed lightly and happily.

"Not an hour. Not a minute. Come, shut

that door, and race me to the stump. No letters in it now."

The door banged behind them, and they ran together down the frozen drive. Rose was mad with glee. She sped like a stream of darkness, softly, glidingly. She was first at the stump, and she stayed there till Ruth came up, panting.

"Over the crust now," she laughed, in a bright exhilaration. "Come! come!"

But though she ran in little dashes, and waited between, Ruth, making what shift she could to follow, crashed through and gave it up.

"Come back!" she called. "You're a fay. I'm a good twenty pounds heavier. That's according to precedent. Don't you see it won't bear?"

But Rosamond skimmed back like a leaf, and then they went on soberly, side by side again. Ruth kept turning to look at her.

"You certainly are changed," said she; "but, oh, you're so pretty! You've got a radiance. You seem to shine. Are you my old chum?"

"Your old chum, your pal in vulgar moments, your Rose to keep."

"Then don't you wither!"

Rosamond laughed again, with that thrilling undercurrent more significant than mirth.

"I may be transplanted," said she, "but wither, no! See the little twigs pricking through the crust! Hear the tips of the pine trees talking! Oh, what a world! what a world!"

"How you enjoy! Exactly like your old apostrophes, 'hot and hot'! You're the most universal lover I know. You're the moon that looks on many brooks. Berries? How ever do you manage to see them in this light? But then, you always were cat-footed and owl-eyed."

It was only a short stretch of road to the Ware homestead, and then a long driveway wound up through the grounds. There the thick evergreens, untrimmed for many years, so encroached upon the way that they half sheltered it from snow, and made it still accessible. Rosamond kept darting into the fir woods, to return laden with news.

"Do you remember how we used to gather cones and burn them on the Anvil Rock? The pines are full. And the hollow locust where we found the squirrel's nest? Nobody has touched it since that day, and his greatest-great-grandson lives there now. Do you remember how we used to do up nuts in our hair, and sit under the tree to let him pull them out? The hepaticas on the

bank are in such a temper — you can't think ! They 're waked up and ready to sprout, and there 's no encouragement."

"That 's according to the light of the spirit. Even you can't see under the snow, Sharp Eyes !" Ruth spoke from the dreamy acquiescence born of full content. She knew quite well that they ought not to be going by night into a deserted house, but Rosamond's assurance had lulled her will to sleep. She was penetrated by the wonder of seeing this dearest creature in the world, whom she had pictured broken and desolate, so lightsome and free of care.

The last sweep of the driveway brought them out in front of the old house, spacious and still imposing, though so evidently the subject of a lingering death. Ruth paused an instant, not daring to look into her friend's face, and only guessing what grief must be painted there. But Rosamond dropped her arm and ran up the steps alone.

"Welcome home !" she called blithely.  
"Welcome ! Why do you wait ?"

Ruth had stopped now in a detaining after-thought. "We 're simpletons," said she. "The key is at the Dayton's, where you left it. That 's

a sign we 're not to go in. Come back, dear, and wait till morning."

But Rosamond held her place. "Come up here, doubter," cried she. "When was anything lost by trying? The oracle appears because you have previously besieged the shrine. Come on! There, now. Shall I lift the latch? Shall I?"

It yielded with the old familiar click, and the great door swung open. Ruth gave a joyous cry.

"You witch, you 've got the key already!" She put a hand on Rosamond's cloak, in gentle suasion. "Let me go in first. Please! I can't bear to have you feel how cold it is, with no one to welcome you. Why, it 's light!" An airy intangibility of warmth and fragrance poured out upon them like a river delayed and eager. The odors were familiar — a mystic alembic made of the breath of flowers, but so fused that you could never say which was heliotrope and which the spice of pinks. They made up a sweetness bewildering to the sense. "Oh!" she cried again; "enchantress! Merlin and Ariel in one!"

Rosamond shut the door behind them. The spirit of a delicate witchery was playing on her face while she led the way into the front room on one side of the hall; this had been the family

meeting-place and talking-place in days gone by. It lay there smiling, in happy renewal of the past. A fire flickered on the hearth with the burgeoning of new flame above old embers. The tall clock ticked in measureless content. The firelight seemed to fill the room. Ruth drew a long breath of rapturous recognition.

"How like you!" she murmured. "You came days ago, weeks ago. You put it all in order—for me. But the intention is n't all. Somebody else might have thought of it, but nobody could have done it."

"You like it? Then I'm glad."

Two chairs were ready before the blaze. They threw off their wraps, and sank into the accustomed places. They sat for a time in silence, while the clock ticked.

"Do you remember"—began Ruth.

"Yes; that was the last time we were here together. I was telling you, over and over again, that the lonesome house would kill me. I behaved like a child—an ignorant, untrained child."

"I won't hear you blamed. You were beside yourself."

"I was a child," repeated Rosamond conclu-

sively. "I can't imagine any one so ignorant, so pathetic in her ignorance. I told you death denied the laws of life. I could only think of my mother in her coffin. I was a savage."

Ruth turned and looked at her in the firelight. Her face lay soft and lovely under a happy seriousness. She seemed absolutely serene, with the well-being of outdoor things, the pine trees, and the snow.

"Rosamond," said her friend impulsively, "have you got religion?"

Rosamond laughed out. "You are so droll!" she answered. "I might as well ask, have you got air in your lungs? Have you?"

"But you're so changed, and for the better. You've grown."

"I had to grow," said Rosamond whimsically. "Part of it at a jump! But let's not talk about finalities. There's one thing I meant to write you about. I made my will, two months ago, and left this house for a home for tired women. It's to be called the Margaret Home — for my own mother, you know. It's to be for middle-aged, tired women: their very own, so that they can come here from the cities and rest. I have named you executor, but I wanted

to speak about it, too. There's nothing in particular to say, for you would always know how I should like things ; still, I thought it would be well to mention it."

Ruth drew nearer, in sudden fear ; but the firelight, playing over Rosamond's face, only brought out the wholesome tints of ruddy cheek and clear gray eye.

"You're not going to die ?" She spoke with that keen alarm hid ever "in the heart of love." Rosamond smiled straight into her eyes, and her strength and beauty seemed to diffuse a certain power like beams of light. Her voice thrilled through the ear to the heart :

"I'm not going to die. I am safe, contented, happy."

"I've often thought," began Ruth hesitatingly—"I have hoped you would marry. I never expected you to be serene, a lone stick like me. You have such an appetite for joy ! How could you be contented with that one thing left out ?"

Rosamond did not answer at once, but the peace of her presence still made itself felt, and Ruth was sure she had not probed her too far.

"That is one of the things I meant to tell

you to-night," she began slowly, as if she had some difficulty in making her phrases fit. "It was not left out. Three years ago I met some one in Italy. He died, and so if I— In any case, I should never have married." Her voice was still musical and unmoved, and Ruth looked at her in amazement. There seemed to be nothing to say. Rosamond went on, broodingly: "You will be glad to know how perfect it was. We understood each other from the first. Whatever it may mean to say, 'I am yours — you are mine,' was true for us. It was when that feeling came that I began to understand life a little better. It was my alphabet. I never spoke about it to you because he died so soon after we found each other. And I didn't take it well. Then, too, I was a child." For the first time some sadness crept into her voice — regret for an obedience missed. Ruth could not answer; she was beginning not to understand. Her friend seemed to speak from the state of one charged with a knowledge not to be fully shared.

"However," continued Rosamond, rousing herself and calling back her former lightness, "it's absurd to wish we had been better and braver and sweeter. What's done is done, and

now—‘the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.’”

Ruth dared probe her no further; she felt invisible barriers.

“Is this another of your witch ways?” she asked, with a groping return to the tangible. “Flowers everywhere? I ‘ve been speerin’ through the dark and naming them. That’s goldenrod in the big jar at my feet: asters, too. Those are columbines on the mantel, and you ‘ve put mignonette and heliotrope on the table, just where they used to stand. Do you carry the magic’ lamp? In my day florists never brought the seasons quite together, like righteousness and peace.”

Rosamond put on a merry disdain.

“Magic lamp!” quoth she—“a kitchen cupboard full. You might as well learn now that lamps seem magical only when they’re out of place. Come, old lady, is n’t it your bedtime? Do you still go when it’s dark under the table?”

“Yes, but not to-night. Still, I suppose we ought to be getting home. I hate to leave this fire. At least, let’s take some of the flowers with us.”

“With us, forsooth! We’re going to stay here.”

"No, child: not in mildewed beds. I draw my line at that."

Rosamond took both her hands and drew her up from the chair.

"Come and see!" she said. "The ocular proof! I scorn to argue." She led the way out into the hall, and up the broad worn stairs. Ruth followed, like a child.

"I'm a coward, and you know it," said she. "But to-night I'm not afraid. I would n't have believed I could be induced to stay till this hour in a deserted house with only sweet you to guard me. But here I am, and here 'I means to stick,' if you say so."

The hall above was peopled with playing lights and moving shadows. The clock on the landing ticked with ancient peace. The firelight came smiling and beckoning from the two opposite rooms at the head of the stairs. Ruth, speechless, stepped into one chamber and then the other. The fires blazed opulently; the beds were ready, turned down in the V shape both girls had learned from their mothers; it seemed to belong to their dual childhood.

"Are we truly going to stay here?" Ruth cried. "Here together? Why, it's like Christmas! It's like heaven!"

"Into bed with you ! I'm going down, but I'll come back again presently and tuck you up. And — if you lie still, like a good little lady, I'll tell you a story."

Ruth began throwing off her clothes in haste.

"Rosamond," she called blithely after her, "cover up the sitting-room fire. We forgot the fender."

So much of life is a barren gleaning after the true harvest ! Little broken impressions, scintillæ of feeling, stay floating about in the memory, and happy is he who can fit them into some sort of a patchwork when days are bare again. Ruth was never so happy, so well content, she remembered afterwards, as when, with an absorbing delight in physical well-being, and a charming sense of the new and absolutely desirable, she made ready for bed, stopping here and there, as she moved about the room, to greet some ancient treasure with a murmur of delight. There was the red cow with one horn ; they had milked her daily in other times. There were the wax flowers they had tried to imitate ; but, alas ! poor little handmaids, because they worked surreptitiously, with the curious secretiveness of childhood, they had no instruction, and no material

save the beeswax in their mothers' work-baskets, chewed into wads by their patient teeth. There, oh joy ! was Miranda, the oldest doll of all, with her abbreviated skirt and long pantalets, sitting woodenly in a corner, quite unmoved by this strange, bright resurrection. Ruth gave her a kiss in passing—a passionate kiss for the sake of former days. She took a handful of sweet-pease from the bunch on the mantel, and dropped them in Miranda's lap. Joy was cheap enough to share. Then she slipped into bed and waited. Rosamond came. She placed a chair by the bedside, and seating herself, drew Ruth's hand into hers.

"Once upon a time"—she began.

"Did you cover up the fire?"

"It's all right. Once upon a time there was a little Child, and he was always crying because he did n't know the difference between Here and There. He was always hating to be Here, and longing to be There. So one day a Strong One came and said to him, 'Come, you Silly Thing, you may go There if you want to.' And he set him on a feather of one of his wings, and took him 'There. And There was a place you could n't imagine if I should describe it to you. The best I can do is to say it was all flowers,

and living odors, and pine trees, and clear sunlight, and sweet winds. It's a place where everybody can be tucked up at night"—

"What makes you have any night?" asked Ruth, from her doze. "Have it all day."

"Leave out the stars, the night dews, the counsel of the leaves? No; we must have night There. But There black is just as lovely as white; so it's all one. And the Child was happy at once, but the Strong One smiled, and said to him, 'It is always so. They are all happy at once, and they might have been before, if they had had eyes to see that Here is There and There is Here.' And the Child said"— But Ruth was soft asleep and breathing peacefully, and Rosamond smiled with great tenderness. Ruth remembered afterwards that Rosamond bent over her once to kiss her on the eyelids, but only to check herself and to draw back among the shadows.

The late moon was regnant in the chamber when she came broad awake. Rosamond was standing over her, one hand on hers.

"Oh, what made you wake me? what made you?" she cried, quite querulous in her loss. "I was dreaming such a dream. I was in a place I

never saw — I can't describe it — I'm forgetting it now. But they were telling me something : the one thing, you know, that explains everything." She sat up in bed, and tried to grasp at the fleeting memory. "It's gone!" She was near crying as she said it. "I almost had the words, but they won't stay."

Rosamond paid no attention.

"Hurry!" she whispered. "Get up and dress. We are going over to your house now. Come!"

Ruth sprang out of bed, and mechanically laid hands on her clothing. She hesitated for a moment to study Rosamond's face.

"You're not frightened?" she asked. "What is it?"

"I've let you sleep too long, that's all. Don't question, dear one. Come!"

She did, indeed, look pale, but something so sweet and comforting still hung about her and the smiling room that Ruth was not afraid. It did not come to her till afterwards that somebody — an alien somebody or something — might be in the house. Rosamond gave a quick little movement of relief when the last hook was fastened. She had Ruth's hat and cloak on her arm, and she pressed them upon her in eager haste.

Then she threw her own cloak about her, and drew Ruth down the stairs. Ruth forgot to step cautiously lest they be heard; she remembered afterwards how her boots clicked, and the rustling of her dress. The fire still flickered in the sitting-room, and the air of the house exhaled a summer sweetness. Rosamond threw open the front door to an icy breath; she parted her lips and caught at it in sobbing thankfulness.

“Ah,” she sighed, “that’s good!”

The door closed behind them, and they hurried down the path. Rosamond swept on like a shadow, her cloak billowing behind her in the wind. A picture flashed before Ruth’s vision of their coming, when they had hurried in play; now their haste was tragic.

“Rosamond!” she called, with all the breath left in her, “you’ve forgotten your hat. You’ll get your death.”

“Come! come!” called Rosamond, over her shoulder. “Hurry! hurry!”

“Then give me your hand. I can’t keep up with you.”

“Not now!” — her voice came back, a dying sound upon the wind. “Hurry!”

They ran like fleeting clouds.

"There, you mad thing"—Ruth began, as they reached her own door, but the urgency of haste clung to her, and she could not finish. She fitted the key to the lock and stood aside.

"Go in," breathed Rosamond faintly. "Go in, dear one, dear one!"

Ruth stepped over the sill, and the door closed behind her. She turned and tugged at it with a sudden sense of loss. It would not yield. She put forth all her strength. "Rosamond," she called, "push! I can't move it!"

When the door opened, Ruth looked out on the sterile dusk of the early morning. The moon had gone down, and the earth seemed mourning her. No one was there. She bent forward into the darkness. "Rosamond," she said. "Rosamond!"

There was no answer. A rustle came from the one oak-tree in the yard. Then there was silence, for the wind had died. In the midst of her gathering alarm a strange peace, a sense of the sweetness and naturalness of the world, fell upon her like a charm, and she smiled out into the darkness as if it were a friendly face. Then, in serenity of soul, she thought it all out. Rosamond was ever a sprite; now she was play-

ing her a trick. She had gone into the shrubbery to hide. Call, and she would not answer; leave her unnoticed, and a moment would bring her tapping at the window. She shut the door and went in. The rooms were still warm, though the hearth fires had died; and she took a fur cloak from the hall in passing, threw it about her, and sat down by the window to wait. And as she waited, the lovely content of the evening stole over her again. She closed her eyes, and to a purring sense of spiritual warmth the dream began where it had left off, and she learned the secret which explains everything. But she never could remember that dream.

She started awake with the sense of some one in the room. The fire was blazing up over new kindling; the sun lay warm on her shoulder. Her mother stood there, and the maid was bringing in wood. Ruth rubbed her eyes and worked her way out of her wraps.

"What a sleep!" she yawned. "Oh, I remember. But what made you come home?"

Her mother was looking at her sadly. She took Ruth's hand. "I had to come," said she. "We've had bad news, and I did n't want you to hear it from any one else. Ruth, you must be

brave. Rosamond died yesterday. They cabled her Aunt Amy from Italy."

Ruth regarded her with straining eyes. Then she began to laugh.

"My poor child," said her mother, beginning to rub the hand she held. Ruth drew it away.

"You must n't, mummy, you must n't," said she. "Don't be sorry for me. It is n't sad. It's lovely, only you don't know it. There's been a queer mistake. No, I won't tell you. Just come with me and I'll give you a surprise. Here's your shawl. Put it on."

She threw it about her, found some gloves and pressed them upon her. Life seemed very dramatic since last night's prologue. She drew her mother along in merry haste; but at the door Mrs. Hollis left her for a moment to step back into the kitchen and whisper a word to Nora:—

"Watch the way we go, and tell Mr. Hollis to follow us. Tell him I can't explain, but he must come."

Then she went out where Ruth was waiting, tapping her foot impatiently, and scanning the path, the shrubbery, the road, lest she be caught herself by her own surprise. She ran an arm through her mother's, and hurried her down the

walk. When they passed the stump post-office she laughed again; but her mother's look of pain recalled her.

"Poor mother!" she said, in a specious coaxing. "Wait a bit, and you'll laugh too. So Rosamond is dead?"

The tears came fast down her mother's cheeks.

"Yes, dead," she answered. "You don't realize it."

Ruth tried to be serious and demure.

"Not yet," she assented. "Just now you're realizing for two." They were rounding the curve of the drive. "But I don't see any smoke. The thriftless thing! she's let the fires go down."

They mounted the steps together, and Ruth, in happy assurance, laid her hand upon the latch. It did not yield. Her mother stood looking wildly down the drive, and praying for her husband's coming. Ruth, her self-possession inexplicably overthrown, was beating at the door.

"Rosamond!" she was calling. "Oh, Rosamond, let me in! Don't be cruel! Let me in!"

"Dear, come home," begged her mother, crying bitterly. "Come home."

Ruth knelt, and looked through the keyhole at the dark. She sprang to her feet.

"I'm going in," she said. "I will go in."

She ran round to the side piazza, on a level with the long windows, opened a blind, and broke a pane of glass. The blood dripped down on it. She turned the fastening, threw up the window, and stepped in, and her mother followed. The room was dark, save for the light from that one window, for all the other blinds were closed. She ran up to the clock and looked it in the face. It was dead and still, the impassive hands pointing stolidly to a lying hour. She laid her hands upon it, as if to shake it into life. The dust lay thick over table and chairs. She threw herself upon her knees before the fireplace and thrust her hand into the ashes. They were cold.

"Mother!" she cried out piteously —  
"Mother!"

"Come home, dear, come home!"

Ruth rose to her feet, sick with wonder, yet reanimated by one last hope.

"Just a minute!" she implored, and ran up the dusty stairs. The door of her own sleeping-room was closed, but she flung it open and walked shudderingly into the darkness within. The bed was unmade, with only a mildewed cover over the mattress. A mouse fled silently

across the floor, a swift brown shadow. Where was the china cow? Where was Miranda? With a throb of premonitory knowledge she threw up the cover of the trunk near the bed. There lay the doll, on orderly rows of playthings packed away for doomsday; they looked as if they might have been there always.

Her mother had followed her, and Ruth turned about, trying to smile.

"I begin to understand it now," she said. "I'll go home. You must n't think I'm crazy. I'm not."

They descended the stairs together and crossed the deserted sitting-room. At the window Mrs. Hollis paused before stepping out.

"I can't understand it," she said musingly. "The house is n't in the least musty. It's as sweet as a garden. Sweeter!"

Ruth stopped, arrested by the truth. The odors of the night were all about her, and as she stood there accepting them, great peace and the sense of security fell upon her like a mantle. She began to smile.

"And they might all be happy," she said to herself, "if they could only remember that There is just the same as Here!"

**HIS ENEMY**



## HIS ENEMY

DOCTOR ST. JOHN was traveling down to Hartsdale by the express. A man of world-wide mark, he had also a local following, and wherever he might go, within a day's journey from home, some one was sure to name him as "St. John, the oculist." A stranger, even, might have guessed at his profession from the keen glance, the considered movements, of a man used to meeting emergencies. The doctor's face wore a veil of reserve: friendly to the present, it indicated a guarded past; and the iron-gray hair, the sunken temples, showed, with some likelihood of exactness, how remote a past it had been. On that journey memory gripped him hard. He was retracing twenty-odd years, and wondering how, in all that time, he could have been so sure God would deliver his enemy into his hand. He put it so, not from any belief in God's immediate justice, but because a formulated saying was easily remembered, and stood by him when he scorned to recall the poor old

drama which had at once impoverished and enriched him.

In that past, so far removed now that childhood seemed the nearer, he was a young man with a good deal of money, some knowledge of medicine, and a beautiful wife. Now, with his perceptions quickened under the lash, he realized how dull he must have been in those old days: not so much with the facile dullness of youth, articulate because it has so little to say, but from that inertia born of prosperity and a belief in the permanence of tangible things. His practice lay among a class whose forbears had hobnobbed with his. He had a serious house full of ancestral gods, on the sacredness of which he most devoutly reckoned; and he had, to hold until Judgment Day, the beautiful wife. Then the other man appeared, the man who delighted in a changing universe, and preached the irony of fixed beliefs; and he, while St. John considered lenses in the office, made romantic love to the wife in the parlor. St. John never knew how it began. If he had known, it would have seemed to him far less dignified than he allowed himself to call it, even when he reflected that his wife had a great-grandmother of unknown extrac-

tion, though indisputably French. It was at first only a foolish little game, born of a man's greed and a woman's vanity, full of roses, echoing regrets, sighs over coming absence, and deification of chivalry and beauty. The woman was a flower plucked too soon ; the man a martyr denied the wearing of her. These were theories easily engendered in a wife who had been wooed too coldly, and a free lance frankly amorous, and lately become an epicure at the feast. Whether the two would have sought each other, had they found no barriers, will not be known ; but the frowning wall of her vow and his dishonor piqued and tempted them. At last they were in love ; and with the enormous egotism of that state, they flaunted their banners and cried out to the world, "Make way !" St. John was slow in discovering the invasion of his home. His wife was cold to him, — that, at least, he knew ; and when, in a moment of hysteria, she told him how she stood upon the ruins of what her life might have been, he suffered that pang of sexual jealousy which is perhaps a man's most terrible inheritance from the fighting male. For him, however, the horror of the situation was equaled only by its simplicity. He walked away from her with-

out dwelling, even in fancy, upon the crass revenges of an earlier age, and as soon as the law would let him presented her with the legal document he thought she craved. She was free. Then he settled half his property upon her, and she and Ferguson, pushed into each other's arms, married and went away, rather dazed, with the wages of indiscretion in their pockets. He had not seen them since, and he had never ceased to believe that God would deliver Ferguson into his hands. He felt quite easy in expecting it, because it seemed to him he did it quite impersonally, as an on-looker who has paid dearly for a place at the game.

People were amazed when he gave his wife her freedom and her fee in that simple fashion. At first they laughed ; then they called it quixotism, and because he kept a steady front they gave up talking about it. But actually no one in the round world dreamed how he bled at the heart, not more from losing the woman than the wounding of an armored pride and the consciousness that his respectable life was wrapped about in bathos. He had inherited unsmirched traditions, and a woman had turned them into a lampoon. The lampoon would never be forgot-

ten. So in his defeated state he carried himself invulnerably, and bent his wits to the practice of medicine. That ill-used mind of his—befogged by the dictum that the St. Johns are a chosen people, bound to intermarry with other chosen people and breed decorum—arose to shine. Necessity had touched him on the shoulder. At first he looked around scornfully, to say, What fellow is this? But the messenger did not quail; and he began to realize that the world is made up of men and women,—not St. Johns and others. After his intellect had expanded to take in that idea, it took in a few more, and his colleagues, wondering, said that St. John was not such a fool, after all. A few years later they hailed him with acclaim. He had given them something; he was the equal of other men who had given. At last he might enter that splendid republic where crowns are won only by desert; and at last, they knew, he loved the equality he had learned to understand. For the first time in a thousand years of arrogance, St. John was a great name, and the man who had made it so wore it with humility.

To-day the doctor's heart beat hard with a personal excitement it was seldom called upon

to register. In spite of himself, he seemed to be reaching forth to a triumph from which, at the same time, he shrank. It was a tawdry situation, and yet quite inevitable. He hated it; but he would no more have refused it than any other step in the appointed way. For through long comparison of deeds and their results, he believed in the constraining power of one act upon another. The germ of this afternoon's event had been planted in his youth. He could not refuse the harvesting.

Taking out the letter, he held it secure from cursory eyes behind him, and read it over. There was not a word in it to be concealed, yet the phrases flamed in fire. It was from Ferguson, begging him to come down and see Mildred. She was alarmingly nervous, and, doubtless for that reason, imagined that something was the matter with her eyes. It was one of her whims that nobody but Doctor St. John could give her a trustworthy verdict, and Ferguson had no resource save to convey her wishes. The letter was sincerely worded, yet, even at his first reading, St. John caught himself threading into it a tone of inevitable shame. He had responded with complete simplicity, believing that, in some

way, this was God's method of handing over his fettered foe.

The day was warm with the grace of Indian summer. A haze dwelt upon the distance, mysteriously purpling above the russet of the fields. For the last two months St. John had been working in the city; and looking to find the year where he left it, he saw how it had fleeted away into this soft magnificence of change. His eyes grew wistful over the transmuting of remembered beauty, where uplands, warm in ripened grasses, swelled beside the track, and fences marked a line of seething underbrush. He felt suddenly alive to every atom of the rolling earth. Some keener sentience had responded to the turmoil of the little world within his brain.

The express drew into the station, where Ferguson himself sat waiting in a speckless trap. St. John knew him at once, in spite of the betraying years. He did not think of the change in himself, as he walked across the platform, bag in hand, with the alert step of one whose arrival bears a meaning. He was the only passenger to alight, and Ferguson knew him; that was the only reason. He nodded, and offered a hand which St. John, setting his bag in the trap, did not see.

"Thought I'd drive you over myself," said Ferguson, as the doctor took the place beside him. "It's rather necessary — see you beforehand, you know. You've got to be prepared."

St. John nodded, not looking at him again, but really almost overthrown by the keenness of his wonder. For fate was being fulfilled. The man had worked out his destiny. Disease had stricken him, and left her cruel marks. Ferguson was heavy; his broad shoulders, once so alluring to the feminine fancy, were shrugged forward under excess of brawn, and his head crouched close between them. But it was the face where, to the practiced eye, Tragedy had taken up her dwelling. The unwholesome flesh, the baggy outline, the tattling color, — St. John shrunk under the implication, as if a curse had fallen there, and he had wrought it. Ferguson pulled the horses into a walk, and, watching them keenly, tried to tell his story.

"It's damned good of you to come!" he burst out, turning for an instant toward St. John.

"We always answer professional calls," said the doctor, unreasonably irritated that, having meant to speak neutrally, he only managed a cold constraint.

"Yes, I know, but — however, here's the whole thing in a nutshell. She's been breaking down, one way or another, for a number of years. I saw it — God ! I guess I did ! Everybody saw it, — but there did n't seem to be anything to do except stand from under. Tantrums, you know, that sort of thing. I've been a brute ; that is, I suppose so. I used to think she could help it ; so I gave her what-for. But that was when she was 'round on her feet. Now she lies and shudders, and says she's going to be blind ; and, good Lord ! a man can't stand that, you know. I'd cut off my right hand."

Involuntarily the doctor glanced at the strong hand in its driving-glove, and read honesty in the husky tone, though it was not yet apparent whether Ferguson would make that sacrifice to benefit the woman or to spare himself her plaints.

"Have her eyes been examined ?" he asked curtly.

"No ; she would n't consent to it unless I'd send for you. Said she could n't bear to hear it from anybody else. The fact is, I don't believe there's anything the matter. It's her general health. She's had a hundred imaginary diseases since she broke down. Now it's her eyes. Is n't that possible ?"

"Quite possible."

"It's all hysteria, I tell her," said Ferguson, letting the horses go, and, quite unconsciously to himself, brightening into pleasure over their action. "Bad enough, but still it does n't kill, now does it?"

"No, it does n't kill," said the doctor; and the two men watched the horses in silence until, driving up a long avenue, they stopped before a colonial house, and a man ran out to meet them. Ferguson became warmly hospitable. He made as if to take the doctor's bag; but St. John, with a little dissenting gesture, laid hands on it himself, and followed him up the steps. In the great hall he took off his overcoat, with the stiffness of one who is breathing an alien air, and then accompanied his host upstairs. He felt as if he should pay exorbitantly for the interview. Still, he told himself rigidly, he could not refuse it. Midway of the flight Ferguson paused.

"Won't you have something before you go in?" he asked. "Glass of wine? brandy?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, dinner 'll be on the table presently."

They stopped before a closed door, and Ferguson knocked, saying, at the same instant, in a whisper, "You go in alone."

"No!" responded St. John sharply. It was a tone quite familiar to his assistant and some of the nurses. His face changed swiftly to a tense command. He had entered his own ground, where he was accustomed to be obeyed. "I may need you," he added. "You will stay."

"All right," complied Ferguson, shrugging his shoulders with the air of one who is never permitted to escape.

Meantime a woman's voice had called twice, "Come in!" and Ferguson opened the door.

"Here he is, Milly," he said; and St. John, advancing with composure, went up to her couch. He had forbidden himself to look at her with the eyes of the heart or memory.

She was lying there, a graceful length, all white lace and light blue ribbons. She rose on one elbow, and a sleeve, in falling, showed the wasting of her arm. She was in the pathetic stage of a woman who has been beautiful, and still retains the charm which is more than beauty. Her black hair had only a thread or two of gray; her black lashes were long and beguiling, but the blue eyes they shaded held an alien look. That was fear. St. John, with a quick professional air, took the seat in readiness at her elbow.

For all his manner told, he might never have seen her until this moment. She put out her hand in an impulsive way, and he, accepting it, laid it gently on the couch.

"Now for the eyes," he said, in a tone of perfunctory cheerfulness. "What seems to be the matter with them?"

They were dwelling on his face.

"How you have changed!" she murmured, her voice touching upon awe.

Ferguson turned quickly on his heel, and in spite of himself St. John felt a flush mount wretchedly to his brow.

"Just draw up that shade," he said peremptorily to the other man. "Help me fix these pillows. Stay by, please. I shall want you."

Then, insisting upon trivial services not in the least needful, he proceeded to an examination. By the time it was three quarters over, she had begun to talk, uncontrollably, like one who finds relief in words.

"It is true, is n't it?" she kept repeating. "Just what I knew before. I am going to be blind. But don't tell me to-day. I could n't bear it yet. I suppose you've told hundreds of people the same thing. It does n't mean anything to

you. Shall you want me to have an operation ? I could n't bear it ! I could n't bear it ! ”

This was her cry — the cry of fear. She could not bear it, whatever it was to be. Meantime, his large white hands, almost divine in their trained gentleness, were upon either side of her head, as he placed it on the pillow. He knew there was some virtue either in his touch or in the acquiescent minds of patients, for he could always soothe them. And then, unprepared for speech, he opened his lips and said lightly, surprising himself as much as he did her,—

“ Well, I don’t think you need to be afraid of blindness yet.”

“ There ! ” cried Ferguson. “ By Jove ! what did I tell you ? Last week it was pneumonia, and the week before, your head buzzed. By George ! I wish there was a pill for hysteria ! ” But his tone was kindly and full of relief. St. John guessed that the little eyes, half hidden within their fleshy caverns, were wet with tears.

Mildred was looking at the doctor.

“ How can you tell me so ? ” she asked calmly.  
“ How can you ? ”

He returned her gaze.

“ I don’t say you have n’t more or less trouble

with your eyes," he continued, "but my theory would be that you must build up your general health."

"Just what I said," interposed Ferguson.  
"The general health!"

"Who is your family doctor?"

"I hate him," she remarked indifferently.

"Has n't seen him for three years," put in Ferguson. "Just lies here and thinks up diseases, and won't let me call anybody in."

"I should suggest your taking to yourself a doctor," advised St. John gravely. "You need to lie in bed awhile: milk, eggs, massage, trained nurse,—that sort of thing. Then, after a time, have your eyes looked at again. I could send somebody down if I could n't come myself." He had privately resolved not to come himself. The test was overpowering him. "Now," he concluded, rising, "if I were you, I'd take a little bromide or something,—got any bromide in the house?—and try to sleep. You are going through a strain. Give up to it. Rest."

She reached forward and caught his hand, clinging to it with both hers, drawing it toward her until he thought she meant to touch it with her lips.

"No! no!" she sobbed. "Don't go. I am so afraid when I am alone. If you go, I shall be alone."

Ferguson drew nearer, not excited by the appeal, as the other man could see, but only wistfully sorry. St. John sat down again, holding her hand.

"You are not to be alone," he said, compelling her attention. "You are not to be alone at all. And you are not to be afraid. There is nothing to be afraid of."

She lay still, her forehead contracted into delicate lines, her lips pitiful. Her lids were down, but the tears trickled underneath them. St. John sat silent until she breathed more calmly, and then took out his tablet and wrote a prescription.

"You'd better send down to the village for this," he said. "It's very simple. Now, remember, you are not going to be afraid or alone. We will take care of you." He touched her hand softly, and her fingers clung.

"When will you come again?" she asked feverishly. And in spite of himself, he answered, —  
"When you need me."

Then he got out of the room, Ferguson behind

him. When they were outside the door, he said peremptorily :—

“Send somebody in to her. Who is there here ? ”

“Her maid.”

“Sensible woman ? ”

“Yes.”

“Very well, send her. Have this put up, and give it to her.”

Ferguson summoned the woman, and, from the hall below, dispatched a boy for the medicine. Then he drew a long breath, and wiped his forehead.

“By George ! ” he breathed, “that’s a good job well over. The fact is, she was so keen on it I half believed she was right. Her eyes, you know,—something the matter with them.”

They turned into the library, and St. John sank into a chair.

“There is,” he said hopelessly.

Ferguson sat down opposite, and looked at him.

“It takes it out of you,” he remarked untactfully, but with a kindness St. John could not resent. “You’re as white as a ghost. Wait a jiff. There’s a decanter across the way.”

St. John stopped him with a gesture.

"I don't want anything," he said. "As to her eyes, she is right."

Ferguson was staring at him. His own eyes were almost bulging. With his bulk and terror, he looked, St. John saw with an idle interest, almost froggy.

"Right?" repeated Ferguson. "Then there is something serious?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean she's going to be blind?"

"Inevitably."

"You thought it best to deceive her?"

"I don't know."

Ferguson looked at him as if he wondered what key would unlock him.

"You don't know?" he repeated.

"No; I had no intention in speaking. I simply did n't tell her."

There was a dark silence, and Ferguson said to himself, "Well, I sha'n't tell her."

"No," St. John acquiesced.

They fell into a maze of thought, and seemed to forget each other. The moment was broken by a soft-voiced maid, coming in to announce that dinner was served. Ferguson rose with a start, and St. John rose also, saying:—

"Where did I leave my coat? I must be getting on."

"Of course, after dinner; though I'd like you to stay the night. I believe they're ready for us in the dining room."

"Thank you," said St. John, now in the hall, struggling into his coat. "But I lunched late, and I'm rather depending on the walk. I want a breath of country air."

Ferguson looked worried and defeated.

"Oh, come, now!" he urged; "have a bite of something, and I'll drive you the twelve miles to the flag station. You can take the train there. You'll find lashings of country air."

But St. John was on the outer step now, bag in hand, looking his determination. The moist cold of the twilight struck upon his face, and recalled him to professional demands.

"She should see a doctor," he said. "Hamerton's a good general practitioner. As I remember, he's only a mile or so from here. Put her into his hands. But first send him up to consult with me." He turned away, and then, with the uncontrollable impulse of a non-impulsive nature, turned back. "Pardon me for saying that you should see a doctor yourself," he added. "Borrowdale, for example."

Ferguson started, as if the words had stung him. His face grew livid.

"Good God!" he sibilated. "Can you see through stone walls? How do you know what's the matter with me?"

The doctor was drawing his gloves through his chilling hands.

"I should see Borrowdale," he repeated, and walked away down the steps.

Ferguson was beside him; he was trembling, and his voice, too, shook pathetically.

"For God's sake," he was entreating, "don't leave a man like this! How did you know I'd seen Borrowdale?"

"I did n't. I recommended your doing it."

"Well, Hamerton recommended it, too. I went last week."

"So!" said St. John, with an unhappy attempt at lightness. "Then you have n't got to do it again."

Ferguson stopped short, with so compelling an air that St. John stopped also and looked at him. The man was gazing off into the west, where windy clouds were parted by a line of light.

"No, I have n't got it to do again," he said savagely. "I've paid my scot. I've been told

to live moderately, cultivate a cheerful mind, keep a medicine bottle at my elbow and some little pills in my pocket. Want to see 'em? There they are." He took out a small pasteboard box, and glanced at it with a curious distaste. "I did n't know I had any imagination," he continued, drawing the words, with difficulty, from some fund of hateful experience, "but that box has given me D. T. I'd rather see snakes under the bed. I'm afraid of it, but I don't dare to stop carrying it 'round, and I don't dare to stop taking the pills." He looked full at his listener, with the stare of one summoning a familiar horror. St. John could see that he was under the spell of a breaking mortality. This is the moment when the soul is beckoned from a body still robust. It has not reached the stage when gravity is overcome, and it rises from the earth of its own lightness. St. John, like all doctors, had read the moods of those who are to be reft away. He knew how terrible the pang may be in anticipation, how simple and natural it is when it really comes.

"This is the first stage," he said, hardly knowing how he spoke. "You won't mind it later."

"Not mind it! Great God!" breathed Ferguson. "Give up all this, and not mind it!" He looked about at the trees, and then beyond at the horizon and the upper sky, as if he owned them all.

"Have you told — any one?" St. John hesitated.

"Mildred? No. That's the devil of it. What am I going to leave her to?" Again the tears came into his eyes, and the doctor, hardly knowing he did so, put out his hand to his enemy; and so they parted.

St. John walked to the station with a determined haste. His blood flowed quickly. He was conscious of that deep excitement which rises inevitably as a tide obedient to spiritual issues; but action had ceased to express even the index of what he felt. Blinding possibilities stared him in the face. He could not as yet guess at their outcome; he could only quiver under their terrible concrete potency.

The next day, when time had served him as time will, and enabled him to settle into a habit of thought, it was not quite the same. Yet he could only see himself in the midst of a moral puzzle. His enemy and his enemy's wife were

not to be formulated. Hitherto, they had seemed to him two creatures set in the universe in relation to himself alone. He smiled with an awe-stricken amusement born of the discovery that he had overrated the forces of this vastness called life. He had regarded it from the one centre made by himself, only to find that this was no centre at all, but only another fluent atom. For many years Ferguson and Mildred had borne the part of sinners whom he was presently, by some righteous necessity, to judge. Now they insisted on appearing as well-defined individuals, who belonged neither to him nor, perhaps, to each other. Each seemed to be clinging to some uncertain spar, quite isolated, quite out of relation to anything human,—companioned only by that mystery whence being springs. More than that, the professional conscience, rising up in him, bade him remember that there was something practical to be done, and bound him, by all forms of honor, to do it.

In a few days Doctor Hamerton came up to consult with him, and they agreed that, in the woman's present state, nothing should be said to disturb her. The blow must fall, but time itself might soften it. Then followed daily bulletins,

irksome to St. John in welding a tie he left unrecognized, and at the same time assuaging the anxiety he had to feel. For a time Hamerton said she was better, and, as he boldly assumed, from having seen St. John and receiving from him some impulse of cure. But now she was falling into uncontrolled hysteria; and he felt with her that she needed to see the oculist again. At least it was an experiment to be made. So the other man went down, and got off at the little station where bare tree trunks were blackened under melting frost. This time Ferguson did not meet him. He was keeping his room a good deal, the coachman said.

At the house a nurse stood visibly in waiting, and her look hurried St. John up the stairs. Mildred lay on her couch, a handkerchief across her eyes.

"You have come!" she cried, in shrill welcome. "I thank God! I thank God!"

He sat down by her and took her wrist in a reassuring grasp. She drew a long breath, as if, in that, she relinquished all the responsibilities of life.

"They are worse, you see," she whispered. "I have to keep them covered now. They feel

safer in the dark. But sometimes I scream and tear the bandage off, for fear the dark is real."

"And it never is," he returned quietly. "You haven't any right to dread things until I tell you to. You must meet it calmly."

"Meet it! Meet what?"

"Whatever comes. Life. The whole business."

"But I am afraid of meeting it alone."

This interchange seemed quite simple, as things do in extreme emotion, and it never occurred to him to wonder whether she had ceased counting Ferguson in at all. Like a priest, he recognized the power of his office. To her he was the doctor, potent, if not to save, to establish, by virtue of inherited usage, some commerce between life and death.

"You shall not be alone," he said calmly.

"Do you promise that?"

"Yes, I promise."

She sighed, this time with glad abandonment; and, lifting the bandage, he held his beneficent hands at her temples, to shield her from the light. A smile dawned on her face.

"How kind you look!" she whispered. "How kind you are!"

Yet this apparently had nothing to do with the man he had been twenty years before, or the woman who betrayed him. It was all strangely impersonal. He went through a perfunctory examination, and then, calling in the nurse, made much of certain harmless measures calculated to impress the patient's mind. When he had finished his visit Mildred was quite composed, though a little flush had risen in her cheeks, and she showed some of the eagerness of renewing life.

"Will you come whenever I send?" she asked him.

"I will try," he answered gravely. "I am very busy."

"But if I send because I can't bear it another instant, then you'll come?"

"Yes, I'll come."

There was no vestige of her former coquetry. He remembered her, with a sting of hurt pride, as a woman who, in her most unconsidered moods, had waved, though always delicately, the challenge of her sex. She was provocative of flattery, an exaggerated devotion, all the fleeting bloom of life. Now she regarded her prerogative no more than if she had been a ship-

wrecked creature clinging to a plank. Salt seas had washed the Lilith out of her. He left her still smiling, and in the hall was told that Mr. Ferguson wanted him. There, in an upper room, he found him sitting, his feet stretched on a chair. He had changed with the later stages of an unyielding malady.

"I tell you what it is, St. John," he began, with no civil preamble; "this won't do. It's too much for me. Sometimes I think I'll blow my brains out for good and all."

"Oh no!" said St. John, taking a chair near him. "You can't do that, you know."

"Why can't I?"

"I don't precisely know the reason, but you can't."

At that moment St. John failed to summon moral arguments of any color. He passed a weary hand over his forehead, and reflected, with a certain irritation, upon the inadequacy of creeds. "Besides, the shot would be heard downstairs."

"I know," said Ferguson, as if that established a soul-satisfying reason. "I moved up here to be out of her way. I go down half a dozen times in the forenoon or afternoon. She

thinks I'm out the rest of the time,—driving, what-not,—and I spend the evening with her. But it's got to end. Who's going to tell her?"

"We seem to have refrained from telling most things, so far," said St. John miserably.

"There's money enough," continued Ferguson, as if he meditated aloud. "She's all tight and snug, so far as that's concerned." And, ironical as it might have seemed, neither of them considered whose money it had been that made the safety.

St. John got away without being, as he fancied, of any practical use; and he lived for weeks thereafter in expectance of the crisis which inevitably came. The news of it was sent him at once by the attending physician. Ferguson had taken to his bed for good, and nobody had been willing to tell his wife the reason. St. John accepted the summons, and went down; but before he reached her she had guessed, and met him in the hall, strained with apprehension.

"He is very ill," she said rapidly. "I'm afraid he has been ill for a long time."

"Yes." St. John was regarding her with that loving-kindness wrought in him by the study of

human needs. "He concealed it to spare you. Now you must spare him."

Her face fell into lines of unmistakable horror; he could not tell whether it was that of grief, or distaste for a distasteful situation.

"I ought not to have neglected him!" she whispered.

"You need n't neglect him any more."

"But what can I do?"

"Be steady. Be patient. You know what it is to be afraid. Help him not to be."

"Will you stand by me?"

"Yes."

Then it became evident to St. John that Ferguson had got his second wind. He had fallen into that acquiescence which belongs to the last victory of the soul, and was showing a stubborn courage more to be desired than the gallantry of assault. Some unexpected joy seemed to fall into his cup through the strength of the woman who ministered to him. His eyes followed her. She did not flag.

"Good old girl!" he whispered more than once. "I did n't think she had it in her."

The disease fulfilled every condition of prophecy, and hardly seemed to interest the sick

man in any degree, now that he had once looked into that darkening vista at the end. St. John's frequent visits gave him some counterfeit of pleasure, though they talked of nothing more significant than the level of stocks or paces of a horse. So far as words went, St. John found him a very good fellow ; and, however much he avoided retrospect, he began to see more and more clearly how Mildred had been moved and carried by that assertive strength. It stood for a great deal, little as it might fulfill, — earthly delight, action, joy. Coupled with youth, Ferguson's equipment might well have proved irresistible. Once St. John would have drawn from that residuum of Puritanism, which served him for imagination, a certainty that they two could hardly have met thus at the gates of death without a clashing of spiritual weapons, question and answer, accusation and dull reply. From the smitten man there should be remorseful groping toward the forsaken path of honor, hidden by his own sad choice. And the victorious foe ? He was meant to stand unmoved, looking on at God's fashion of requital. But this mortal progress proved, in fact, as lacking in sensationalism as if it were a journey to market. Ferguson's re-

bellion against his sentence had only lasted out the strength given him to rebel ; and finally, a man of simple courage to the end, he gave up the ghost and was buried.

That night, St. John found himself in his office staring at the fire, and remembering nothing save that his enemy was dead. The fact, in its completeness, affected him only with helpless incredulity. The flaming chapter had not ended with bugle and drum ; it had not ended in bathos. It looked exceedingly like the life we live every day.

For three weeks he heard nothing of Mildred, though Doctor Hamerton reported that she had collapsed into nervous misery ; but when he had begun to wonder how he was to meet her growing trouble, she sent for him. This was, in every lineament, the first winter day. Abundant snow had softened outlines, and re-created a virgin earth. A last flooding sunlight lingered on the fields. St. John shrank from its gay well-being. It seemed too bright a world for those other failing eyes to meet. Nevertheless, he was more tranquil than for many years. Life seemed to him very satisfying, as it does when we have once guessed at the beautiful equilibrium of

things, and the only right of the striving atom,  
— the right to sacrifice.

Mildred was in the library, standing motionless to meet him. Her white dress gleamed in curious contrast with the wanness of her face. Perhaps, absorbed as he was in large issues, he had not expected to see her in widow's weeds ; at any rate, the lack of them bore no significance. Her trouble had endowed her with something womanly and new. That haggardness had aged her, but it made her sweet. He could trace in it the immemorial look of grief lent by the Mother of Sorrows to all her daughters after her.

" You must tell me the truth to-day," she said, when they had clasped hands. " I know it now. They are worse. Can anything be done ? "

" Sit down," he bade her gently ; and she sank into a chair, yet still with her imperfect gaze upon his face.

" Do you want me to keep saying it over and over ? " she continued, with a touch of reproach. " Well, I 've got the courage. I am going to be blind. Do you deny it ? "

" No, Mildred," he answered, using her name for the first time. " No, I do not deny it."

She swayed a little in her chair, and then recovered. She had expected the answer, and yet it shook her. She moistened her dry lips, and pressed her hand upon them.

"How long?" she asked huskily.

"That I cannot say. It will not be sudden. You will have time to accustom" — There he stopped, appalled by the brutality of the phrase.

"I wonder what I am going to do?" she murmured to herself.

His answer sprang, not from considered thought, but with a lifetime's cumulative force. It seemed quite simple to him.

"Will you come and live with me?"

She turned upon him, her face flooded, quickening into youth.

"Why? why?" she asked hurriedly.

There was no reason to give, and he did not invent any. Gallant subterfuges had died, with many other buds unfolding in old days.

"I wish it," he said courteously. "It will be — what I wish."

Her eyes still dwelt upon his face, incredulously, yet with a struggling joy. She bent forward, and thrilled him by a whisper: —

"Is it — do you love me?"

She waited for her answer. In that instant, what thronging memories beset him! Love! He saw it in the roseate apotheosis of youth, announced by chiming bells, crowned with unfading flowers, the minister to bliss. He followed it through stony paths marked by other blood-stained tracks up to the barren peaks of pain. Was it the same creature, after all, rose-lipped or passion-pale, starving with loss or drunken on new wine? Was it the love of one soul accompanying him through all, or was this his response to the individual need, and only a part of the general faithfulness to what demands our faith? He was not silent long enough to bring her to confusion, and yet it seemed to him an age of retrospect. He recalled himself.

"Mildred," he said gently, with a compliance so exquisite as to seem like love itself, "I don't know how to define things. I stopped a good while ago. It isn't possible, when you have much to do with life. But whatever happiness I am capable of would result from your coming to me."

"I cannot believe it," she said slowly to herself. "I never dreamt you were this kind of man."

He might have answered that, had she not laid his former life in ruins, he never would have been this kind of man. But even the thought was far from him. He only waited for her to speak, and then, as she palpably could not, he went on :—

“Perhaps conventionalities signify as little to you as they do to me. They are not important to me now, if they stand in the way of something greater. Perhaps you would be willing to come to me as soon as possible. Then, if we were under the same roof, you would feel safe. I fancy you would not be nervous. You would accept things.”

“Ah!” she breathed quickly. This was the first gleam of hope in all her darkening lot. But through her gains and losses she had kept some accountability to the world. “It would seem,” she began — “people would say” — Then a scarlet shame beset her. She remembered who had betrayed their common life to vulgar tongues.

The doctor took her speech precisely at its face value. That was easy, for he had left himself outside the question. Life had resolved itself into a hurried progress, wherein his only duty

was to act. There was no time, between this and death, even to listen for the world's dull verdict.

"It is true," he said. "The memory of the dead must be respected ; but extraordinary cases demand like remedies. When you consider that his one thought, through his illness, was to save you pain, you can imagine that your safety would give him more pleasure than anything else."

But she was not thinking of the other man. Her mind had wandered, woman fashion, to the past, piecing it, with unreasoning precision, to the living hour. St. John was beginning here.

"I don't want to urge it unduly," he continued, "but it is only fair to tell you that you would have a sheltered life, a free one. I should wish to be regarded as your friend, one who would make no demands on you."

She seemed to suffer under a secret sting. Perhaps, without even sketching for herself the outlines of that most thrilling dream, she craved the urgency of love as it is in youth, eager and uncontrolled. Even his kindness left her a woman scorned ; but the next words, though spoken awkwardly, disarmed her.

"I should be," he said, "your debtor — always. I need n't say that."

"Robert," she whispered, with sudden passion, "when did you forgive me? You *have* forgiven me? Then — at once — or lately?"

He started up in irrepressible feeling, and stood there gripping the back of a chair until his hands blanched under the pressure.

"We can't say those things," he answered huskily. "We can't go back. We must begin now. Mildred, won't you take it, — what I have to offer you? Won't you come?"

Her face softened into something pathetic, and yet grateful.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I will come."

She held out her hand, and he gave it a little pressure. But instead of putting it to his lips, he drew her gently up from her seat and led her to the window.

"Come," he said, "let us take a look at the eyes."

**NATALIE BLAYNE**



## NATALIE BLAYNE

It was a gentle autumn day, full of beguiling promise. The earth smelled good from ripened chalices. The mist hung in the distance like an enchanted censer-cloud, and no air stirred. This was the top note of fruition, so subtly mingled with hope that the human heart had to be heavy indeed not to rejoice in it.

Old Madam Gilbert lay in an upper chamber sick nearly to death ; and no one knew her ailment. She had taken to her bed two weeks before, and languished there, not saying a word beyond quiet commonplaces, but with her dark eyes following her husband piteously, as he walked about the room doing little services for her. As time went on he seemed to be superseding the nurse, because, as he and his wife both knew, he could translate her wishes better than anybody else. Now she was growing swiftly weaker, as if unseen wings were wafting her out of life.

“Is there anything on her mind ?” the doctor

asked her husband, when he took his leave that day.

"No! no!" said old Ralph Gilbert, with all the certainty of his gentle heart. It hardly seemed worth while to fret either of them by asking that. He knew her life from sunrising to dusk through these difficult days, as he had known it every day for forty years. At night they had slept in like security of unison, one wrinkled hand clasped upon the other. Their hours had been like precious fragments welded into one.

"No," said he, "there is nothing on her mind."

"Queer!" muttered the doctor, with a puzzled frown. "There's nothing the matter with her, yet she's slipping downhill. I'll come tomorrow."

Ralph Gilbert stood for a moment in the doorway, looking out on the sweep of lawn and the noble trees that were all his — and hers. A sob came into his throat, and the air wavered before him. It was not possible that the final word had been spoken to their blended life together. The doubt, the hint of change, at once made that life ineffably precious to him, and he turned and went

up the stairs in haste, like a boy, knowing there would be time enough for grieving afterwards. Delia, his wife, lay high upon the pillows in the great south room where the sun slept placidly on the chintz-covered chairs and old-fashioned settings. Her delicate profile looked sharp, and the long black lashes softened her eyes pathetically. Her gray hair went curling in a disordered mass up from the top of her head like a crown. She was a wonderful old creature, with a beauty full of meaning, transcending that of bloom and color. Her husband, standing there by the bedside, subtly resembled her. He was rather slight, and his fine old face, though it lacked the intensity of hers, had a mobile charm. He put one hand on hers, lying in ringed distinction outside the sheet.

“Dear,” said he, an extremity of love in his voice, “don’t you feel any better?”

“I feel very well, dear,” answered the old wife, in a tone as thrilling as her face.

“But you don’t eat, dear!”

“I eat all I can. I need very little, lying here.”

“Diana will be here to-night.”

“Yes. That will be good.”

He sat down by the bedside, and, like a faith-

ful dog, refused to leave her, though she besought him not to miss his dinner. The nurse came and brought her a glass of something, but after a few teaspoonfuls she refused to swallow.

"I can't," she said. "It chokes me. Ralph, won't you go down to dinner?"

"No, dear," said the old man; "if you can't eat, I can't."

He bowed his head upon her hand, and she felt his tears. So, to please him, she tried again to drink; and seeing what poor work she made of it, and how it distressed her to try, he yielded and went down. Then she rested while the light faded, and in the early evening he brought Diana up to her. Diana, entering the room, dwarfed them both by her size, her deep-chested, long-limbed majesty, her goddess walk. She was a redundant creature in all that pertains to the comforts of life. She looked wifehood and motherhood in one. Her shoulder was a happy place for a cheek. Her brown eyes were full of fun and sorrow. Her crisping hair was good for baby hands to pull. She went swiftly up to Madam Gilbert, and touching her very gently, seemed to take her into her heart and arms.

"You lamb!" said she.

"There, Delia, now!" cried Ralph Gilbert, as if it were an efficacious thing to be called a lamb. Aunt Delia put up a languid hand to the firm, red cheek.

"Diana!" said she, "that's nice."

"I expect you'd like to have her stay with you an hour or two to-night," suggested the old man. "I shall be here too, Delia. Right round the corner." He pointed to the dressing-room where he had lain ever since she fell ill, stirring at a breath.

"Yes," said his wife. "You stay, Diana. Yes, Ralph, I know you'll be here."

"It puzzles me," said Diana later to her uncle, when they stood in the hall below, while the nurse made ready for the night. "There's nothing the matter with her, but she seems struck with — she seems strange."

The old man's face fell into the lines of a grief she could hardly meet.

"That's like Delia," said he solemnly. "She won't go like anybody else. It won't be sickness. She'll waste away."

"But I don't see," began Diana perplexedly. "Well, never mind. I'll stay with her to-night, and maybe in the morning we can tell."

At nine o'clock she was installed with full prerogative in the chintz-gardened room. The nurse went to bed, and Uncle Gilbert camped on his temporary couch. He was very tired, and when Diana heard the breathing that betokened sleep, she softly shut the door upon him and returned to her great high-shouldered chair, just beyond Aunt Delia's gaze. The lamp burned low, a pin-speck in the moonlight, and the few embers broke and fell together on the hearth. The time went on for an hour, and she was conscious that Aunt Delia did not sleep, but lay there in an acute watchfulness like her own. At eleven Diana stole out of her chair to feed her, and found the great eyes wide open in the half light as if they had lost all power of closing. Diana never failed to enrich the life about her through lack of words. To her mind the gracious and loving thing must be said, lest there remain no time for saying it.

"Dear heart!" she whispered. "What's the matter with you? The doctor doesn't know. You do. I know you do. You tell. Tell Diana, dearie. Diana's nobody."

"Move your chair a little nearer," said the old lady. "Towards the foot. There, so! Maybe

I'll tell you, if I can. How long were you married, dear?"

Diana's hand went to her throat, where the blue wrapper fell away and showed a noble contour. She had never got used to her grief, that unmated mourning like the bird bereft when summer is at flood and the other creature is mysteriously lost in a clear heaven.

"Only two years," she said.

"Two years," repeated the old lady musingly. "And I have been married forty-one. You missed a great deal, Diana."

"Yes, I missed a great deal."

"You had the happiness of it, but you missed growing into his likeness and finding him growing into yours. I have had forty-one years."

"We won't have a golden wedding," said Diana, at random. "That's too much publicity. But I'll come and crown both of you with vine leaves in the garden, and uncle will reel off Horace, and we'll drink Hippocrene. I don't know what Hippocrene is, but it sounds very delirious, and it's none too good for wedding-days."

It was a change indeed when Aunt Delia forbore to smile at foolishness; but the dark eyes still looked solemnly forth into the shadows, and she said musingly:—

"I hoped it would be a good many more years, so that one of us would n't have long to stay alone. But we can't tell, we can't tell."

Diana felt the unyieldingness of the situation. Here was a difficulty which was no difficulty, and yet it seemed impervious.

"Dear," said she, "you tell Diana all about it."

She put her warm hand over the frail old one, and Aunt Delia turned a little on her pillow, and, as it seemed, snuggled into a confidential frame of mind.

"I was not very young when I met your uncle, dear," said she, "not as things went then. I was twenty-seven. Now, I believe it is different. Women are as old as they behave now. It was n't the same in my day."

"We 're as old as our ambitions now," said Diana. "However, we 're not very partial to crows'-feet and double chins, I 've noticed. Well, dear?"

"Your uncle was very attractive. You know that, of course?"

"Yes, auntie. He 's always been an old dear."

"He was n't an *old* dear then," said her aunt, in delicate reproof. "He was a very high-spirited young man, working hard at the law, and

singing a great deal, and reading the classics in the evening. I am proud of your uncle's youth. He was a poor boy, and he made himself a name."

"Yes, dear," said Diana tentatively, in the pause that followed. "Take a sup of wine. You must n't talk too much."

"It does me good," said the old lady, with zest. "I'm going to tell you something that has lain in my mind for over forty years. They say women can't keep secrets. I've kept this one. You 'll keep it too, Diana. You 'll understand, and see you can't ever tell. You know, my dear, your uncle has a very poetic mind. He is full of fun, but never to the detriment of his ideals."

Diana stopped herself in time from saying again that he was an old dear. She thought she knew exactly what kind of a youth Uncle Ralph's had been,—hot-headed, erratic, full of impossible ambitions trained into working forces by his mate.

"When we met," said Aunt Delia, "it was like the great stories. We recognized each other. We saw it had got to be. Your uncle was too poor to marry, but — my dear, I felt from the first as if I were his wife already."

"I know," agreed Diana softly. "I know."

"I was perfectly happy until a week before our wedding-day. Then one evening we were sitting in the garden. It was just such weather as this. I could smell the grapes.—I hoped to put up my own preserves this year.—Well! well! Somehow—I don't know how it came about—I mentioned Natalie Blayne. She was a girl a good deal younger than I, and she came here for a visit. I had seen her two or three times, but she never made much impression on me. Well, I spoke her name. 'Natalie Blayne!' said your uncle. 'Natalie Blayne!'" Madam Gilbert sat up in bed, and her voice rang dramatically. Diana saw that she was forgotten, and that the other woman was acting out a scene which had played itself in her memory many a time. "'Do you know her?' said I. His eyes grew very bright. His face changed, my dear. 'Natalie Blayne!' said he. 'I saw her for an hour, a year and a half ago. She came into Judge Blayne's office, and he sent me out with her to find columbines in the meadow. I liked her better at first sight than any woman I ever saw.'"

"But, auntie!"

"No, dear," said Madam Gilbert conclusively,

as one who has long ago settled that disputed point, "he didn't even know he said it. Somehow we were on such terms that he never had to put a guard upon his lips. 'But did n't you try to see her again?' said I. 'No,' said he; 'how could I? I was a poor boy in Judge Blayne's office. Besides, she was going abroad the next week.' 'So you lost her?' said I. He took my hand, and said the fingers were cold. Then he went on talking about what he calls potential mates. You know, my dear, he thinks there are many people we recognize instinctively when we meet them. They have a kinship with us. Sometimes it is explained. Sometimes it never is. These are our potential mates. You've heard him talk about it?"

"Of course I have," said Diana. "The dear old simpleton!"

"What, dear?"

"Yes, I've heard him talk. Go on."

"Well, I went to bed that night thinking my wedding-day was coming in a week, and that somehow, without any pain to him, I'd got to break it all off. Because he'd liked Natalie Blayne better than any girl he ever saw in his life, I knew I'd got to get her for him."

"But, auntie!" said Diana despairingly—"auntie!"

"Yes, my dear, I know. You think I was unreasonable. But those things have always been very sacred to me. I believe in the one true mate—there are many others too, my dear; I don't deny that—but one true one. And if it was Natalie Blayne!"

She sat there in her white bed, looking forward with eyes so moving in their childlike pathos that Diana's heart yearned over her. But she despaired of comforting anything so frail yet so invincible, so capable of pain.

"Aunt Delia," said she, in futile rallying, "here you are, uncle's commanding officer and mine, with power of life and death over us, and yet you're nothing but a baby. How can you suffer so?"

In her loneliness such conjuring seemed like tempting Heaven. If the man she loved could walk the earth again, he might moan over potential mates by the battalion, so that she only put the cup to his lips and touched his hand.

"I made up my mind to it," said Madam Gilbert, "and next day—my dear, it was like a tragedy!—word came that Natalie Blayne was

married. Whatever I did, he could n't have her, after all."

"There!" Diana said whole-heartedly, "*she* was disposed of."

"I told him myself," continued the old lady. "I told him in the garden. I thought it might be a blow. I didn't want him to hear it from anybody else. 'Natalie Blayne is married,' I said. I could n't look at him. Just then mother called from the window, and your uncle never had to answer me at all. But he went away quite early that day."

"Well, I should hope he did. Six days before his wedding! He went to buy the ring. *I know!*"

"Then I was tempted," continued the old lady fiercely, "and I yielded. What I really felt was this: 'If there is another woman in the world to whom he turns, I won't marry him.' But then I said, 'He can't have her. Let him take me. I'd rather be second best with him than first in heaven.'"

"Good for you, auntie! That's the way to talk."

"So we were married, and I kept on caring more and more and more and more — and so

did he ; and he was happy, and I was, too. But all the time Natalie Blayne stood between us. I had a terrible feeling as if I had stolen him from her, and the time must come when they would meet, in some other world, and he 'd say, 'Why, here you are, my mate ! '''

"O you poor little child !" cried Diana. " You poor little tragic, foolish child ! "

" My dear, I have always held those things very sacred. But at last I began to forget her ; and then, five years after she was married, her husband died, and the story ran that she was coming home to live with old Judge Blayne."

"But surely you did n't think" —

"Oh no, my dear ! He was too good, he was too honorable ever to have looked away from me. But don't you see, if he had n't married me, he could have had her, after all."

Diana chafed a little under this theory of Uncle Ralph's invincibility. " You don't seem to consider," she ventured to suggest, " that Natalie Blayne may have been devoted to her husband's memory."

" I do, my dear, I do. But if they were mates, your uncle and she, why, she might recognize it this time, and that other marriage would have been only an episode."

"Now, I 'll tell you," said Diana, "I begin to be a little sorry for Natalie Blayne. You bandied her about in a pretty fashion. She might as well have been that slave girl they wrangled over in the Trojan War."

"Well, she came, but only for a visit. Your uncle was away, it happened. I saw her. She was quite tall, with wonderful red hair. It curled. Red hair never turns gray, you know."

"It does worse," muttered Diana. "But never mind."

"I looked at her as I never had before. She had a lovely mouth. The upper lip was short and made a little pout, yet it wasn't a small mouth either. Her teeth were white as milk. Her hair grew in a little peak on her forehead. Her clothes were made in Paris. The long veil — my dear, she was slender, but that veil made her majestic."

Diana put her arms out and drew the rocking figure to her heart, but not to keep it there. Aunt Delia needed no woman's comforting : only that of the man who, in her despairing fancy, had been her soul and flesh and yet not wholly hers. Diana felt for her an agony of pity. Her grief seemed at once so tragic, so compounded of the

spiritual jealousies and renunciations that take hold on life and death, and at the same time of the lesser pangs that make up sexual cruelties.

"Well, she went away," said Madam Gilbert, "but I heard about her. She studied music—she'd always played well—and now she went to Germany and worked very hard. She played quite wonderfully, sometimes in public. I never played. Your uncle was always fond of music. So there she stood between us until—she must have been forty then—she married again. Her name is Meredith."

"Oh, so she married again! Well, she seems not to have shrunk from experiments."

"Oh, but, my dear, does n't that prove they were experiments? If she had married her true mate—and if I had not married your uncle, you see he would have been free—well! well!"

Diana thought she knew a good deal about womankind, but for the first time she began to penetrate the tortuous course of woman's jealousy.

"But why on earth did n't you say this to uncle?" she urged, in one final despair. "I'd have said it to Jack. I'd have put my two hands on his shoulders and pinned him to the wall, and said: 'Out with it! Do you want Natalie Blayne?

You can't have her ; but be a man ! speak up and tell ! Do you want her ? ”

“ Your uncle was different, my dear. So am I different. And perhaps if you had been married longer you would have learned this : we must never let them see we can be hurt by what has happened. If they do, they keep things from us. They shut up certain chambers and lock the door. And it is n't that we want to go in there, dear ; but it hurts us to think we have pushed them even a hair's-breadth away. We want to live so near them — so near — so near ! ”

“ But, little Delia, don't you see you 've been building up a wall between you all these years ? Out of nothing, too ! — a wall out of nothing ! Uncle Ralph sat there in the garden and got mooning. I 've heard him. He loves the sound of his own voice. He adores being a sort of Heine's lyric. And out of that innocent folly of his you pieced together a hair shirt, and you 've been wearing it ever since ! ”

“ He was quite honest,” said Madam Gilbert solemnly. “ ‘ I liked her better at first sight,’ he said, ‘ than any woman I ever saw.’ It meant so much to him that he quite forgot me when he said it. It was like saying it to himself ”

"But, dear heart, how many men have been bowled over by women they would n't take the gift of for keeps?"

"It may be so now, Diana, but it was n't so in my day. We thought very differently of those things."

Diana pored again over the situation, which, as her amazed mind told her, was no situation at all. "But think of it!" she cried. "You're digging all this up now when you and Uncle Ralph are"— She was about to say "old people," but she stopped. The other woman seemed to be at that moment pathetically young. "Why not forget it?"

Again Madam Gilbert rose up in bed. Her pale cheeks wore each a tiny fever spot.

"Because she's coming here!"

"Natalie Blayne?"

"Natalie Meredith. She's a widow, and she's coming here to see the Blaynes."

"A widow! History repeats itself. But, auntie, in the name of Heaven! Why, the woman must be"— Still, as she instantly reminded herself, this drama had nothing to do with years, and she forbore.

"It's only that I haven't the spirit to meet

it now," said Madam Gilbert faintly. "I hardly had it years ago; but now I am an old woman. I realize it. My hair is white. See how big the veins are in my hands!"

"Never mind! Uncle is older than you are!"

But this was no answer, and Diana knew it. She was talking to a woman whose passion was welling from the exhaustless fountain it had sprung from in her youth.

"Well," said Diana, "we're sure of one thing. You must go to sleep. Drink this. Yes, you must. You don't want uncle to behead me in the morning."

When the old lady was settling down among the pillows, she opened her eyes wide again, and said fiercely: "But it's unjust. It's one of God's injustices. I gave everything I had. He is my husband. I want him in this world, in the world to come. And she's always stood between us."

"Don't think of it now, dear. Don't try to account for anything. Let it all go."

"That's why I told you, Diana. And don't let me see her. I'm not strong enough. Let your uncle see her, if she comes—all he can, dear, all he can. But keep her away from me."

She fell into fluttering sleep, and Diana, watching while the cold dawn painted the sky, reflected upon the strangeness of life. Diana never split hairs. Again it seemed to her incredible that any woman who could live beside the man she loved should treasure cobwebs such as these. To sit at table with a man, to see him come home at night — these were the solid joys she coveted. Then with a sigh she began to muse again over this flimsy tissue woven from a dream.

Next morning Uncle Ralph came in in haste, so renewed by sleep that it seemed amazing not to find his Delia better. He regarded her with some pathos of rebuke, and she smiled wanly back at him.

"It's really ridiculous," said she. "I am an old fool, but I can't help it."

Diana breakfasted with him, and then put on her hat without delay. It took more than one night's wakefulness to destroy her bloom, and she was sweet and wholesome as she stood at the front door surveying the morning, her uncle sadly there beside her.

"I'm going to have a little walk," she said. "That will set me up. Better than sleep — oh,

dear, yes ! Don't tell her I 'm out of the house, will you ? As for you, uncle—well, if I were you, I 'd spend most of my time making love to her."

"I always have done that," declared the old man simply. "I suppose you mean, Diana"—his voice broke—"I suppose you mean I 'd better make the most of every minute now."

Diana turned upon him. "Don't let yourself think of such a thing !" she said angrily. "Die ! Aunt Delia die ! She 's good for twenty years, if we 've got any sense about us. But I tell you this : we 've got to clutch her petticoats and drag her back."

Diana went down the garden walk, looking very splendid, as if she and the morning were in league together. In an hour she came back, all radiance and bloom. Her brown hair was curled the tighter from her haste, the red in her cheeks had deepened as if the sun had sunken into it. Little darts had awakened in her eyes and played about her mouth.

"Heavens, Diana ! what 's happened ?" asked her uncle when she walked into the sick-room. "Who 's left you a fortune ?"

"Nobody," said Diana, in great tenderness,

putting her cheek to the invalid's hand. "They've left it to Aunt Delia. It's a pot of gold."

"Enough to make her very rich?" asked Uncle Ralph. He liked to play at fairy-tales.

"Rich! I should think so. Not a competency, not your old annuities, but rich forever and two days after."

Then she sent her uncle out to walk, exiled the nurse, and assumed her reign again. All that forenoon she took perfect care of the invalid. She gave her food by the smallest quantities, and left her long intervals in quiet. After luncheon she sat down by the bedside and held Aunt Delia's hand.

"Sweetheart," said she, "what do you think I did this morning? I took a walk. My shoe hurt me, and I went in to the Blayne girls' to rest. They were just getting up from the breakfast table. I saw Natalie Meredith."

"Diana!"

"Yes, dear, I did. I could n't help it, could I? Did n't my shoe pinch me? Dear, I could have wept. I did laugh. I went into a gale. They said you must find me excellent company."

"So you have seen Natalie Blayne!" said the old lady, wonderingly.

"Yes. I've seen Natalie Blayne, and she's no sight at all. I hoped to find her a monster, rotund, busked, glittering in jet,—but she's not. No; she's simply a very well-preserved woman, with great evidence of facial massage and a look of exquisite care. Oh, she was pretty! I can see that. She's pretty still. Her hair is n't the glory as you describe, but it's lovely hair. She's got white hands that look as if they could play anything anybody ever wrote, and a great many rings on them. But, dear me, sweetheart! she's only a woman, after all. You've exalted her into something between a Cleopatra and a seraph. She's nothing of the kind."

Aunt Delia was looking steadily out at the red and gold maple-tops, a solemn sadness on her face. Diana began to wish she had caricatured Natalie Blayne.

"Well, dear," said Madam Gilbert presently, "I'm glad you've seen her. I hope it won't come in my way. And we must n't talk about her any more."

That afternoon at four o'clock Diana sent the nurse to walk, and left her uncle in the sick-room. She took up her own station on the veranda,

and sat there until Natalie Meredith came up the garden path. Diana went to meet her, and the stately woman greeted her with a simple grace.

"I feel as if I had deceived you," said Diana sweetly. "I told you Aunt Delia would be cheered by visitors, and now she proves to be too tired. I'm so sorry. But Uncle Ralph wants cheering, too, poor dear! Let me call him. Talk to him, do! Draw him out of himself!"

Natalie Meredith was exactly what Diana had painted her, save, perhaps, a shade more telling. She was the product of a high civilization, charming by nature, and with another charm added to that. She talked well, yet with a sympathetic regard to her listener; she was one of the women who take upon themselves the active share of entertainment. Presently Diana rose, with a pretty air of apology.

"You must let me call uncle," said she.

When she entered the upper room he was sitting by his Delia's side, pathetically essaying the nonsense that, in lighter seasons, made his joy.

"Uncle," said Diana, "I wish you'd come down and talk to a caller. I don't know what to do with her. She is a Mrs. Meredith. She's visiting at the Blaynes'."

A hot look throbbed into Madam Gilbert's eyes, but she kept them steadfastly on the tree-tops.

"Meredith? Meredith?" said Uncle Ralph fractiously. "I don't know any Meredith."

"Why, yes, Ralph, yes!" put in his wife eagerly. "You know her — Natalie Blayne!"

"Natalie Blayne? Oh, yes! She was one of the granddaughters. Heavens, Diana! did n't you tell her your aunt is sick and we're not seeing people?"

"Why, it's Natalie Blayne!" insisted the old lady. Her voice had a piercing quality he had never heard in it, her sombre eyes besought him. "Why, you remember, Ralph! It was summer, and you walked with her in the columbine meadow."

The old man turned on her a look of piteous apprehension. Then he spoke very gently, as we speak to those in pain, "Yes, dear, yes! I don't remember, but I dare say I did."

"You don't remember?"

"No, dear, but I've no doubt it's just as you say. Diana, you run down and tell her to go home. She must be a fool to come at a time like this."

"No! no!" cried Madam Gilbert. "No! you go down, Ralph. You must go. I insist upon it."

Diana got him out of the room and down the stairs. Meantime she whispered to him, "Does she seem to you as well, uncle? Is she sinking?"

"Don't say that!" cried the old man sharply. "Don't say that! Let me get rid of this Meredith woman"—

Natalie Meredith stayed a long time. She liked to talk, and, as she justly thought, these two people needed cheering. She told them a great deal about Germany and the music there, the charted freedom and the atmosphere of pleasure. She did it very gracefully and sweetly, while Uncle Ralph rumpled his hair and fidgeted. So it went on until Diana, warned by the sympathetic tension of her own mind, grew keenly alive to the troubled spirit in that upper room.

"Uncle," said she, with her innocent air of sudden thought, "we've forgotten Aunt Delia's little powder. It's ten minutes late."

Uncle Ralph flew out of the room and up the stairs. When he saw his wife she was sitting up in bed, her eyes turned toward the door. She seemed to be watching in an agonized apprehen-

sion for what a step might bring. The old man hurried to her side and put his arms about her. He forgot the powder, for looking at her face. She was his Delia.

"There, there, honey!" he soothed her, as he had for over forty years. "You lie down. Diana 'll be up in a minute, as soon as that woman knows enough to go."

He laid her back on the pillow and gave her the medicine. She took it obediently, looking at him all the time in an incredulous seeking.

"There, Ralph!" she whispered. "Now go down again."

"Go down? I won't! Her tongue's hung in the middle. She talks a blue streak."

"But, Ralph, it's Natalie Blayne!"

"I don't care if it's old Judge Blayne himself. She's a bore."

"Dear, how does she look?"

"Well enough, I guess. Too much rigged out for a widow. Sheep dressed lamb fashion."

"But, Ralph, should n't you have known her? Does she remind you — Oh, you remember Natalie Blayne!"

"Why, yes, of course I do. The old judge sent me to the depot to meet her, or something.

How he used to rope me in! I went there to study law, and he made me black his boots. But I should have said that girl had brown hair and brown eyes, something like yours, dear, only not so pretty. This one's hair is copper-color. I dare say she does some ungodly thing to it."

Upon the silence that followed this, Diana came in. "She's gone," announced Diana.

"Thank God!" rejoined her uncle fervently.

Diana looked at Madam Gilbert for one solemn moment, and then the two women began to laugh. Aunt Delia laughed until she cried a little, in a happy fashion, and Diana put her arms about her, cooing and calling her a lamb.

"Here, uncle," said Diana, "you've got her back. In a week she'll be putting up preserves."

Madam Gilbert looked extraordinarily pretty and shy, and flushed like a girl.

"You lay out my clothes, Diana," said she happily; "I'm going to get up to dinner."

## **A RUNAWAY MATCH**



## A RUNAWAY MATCH

“So the day is really fixed!” said Miriam, standing with her Julia, her one admiration, on the topmost step and prolonging good-by. “Mamma says you’ve been whimsical about it. But why not? It is n’t a show wedding, and if the bride can’t be allowed to veer and tack all she wants to—well, what’s the use of being a bride?”

Julia was lifting her skirt a little with one firm hand, and preparing to descend, in the lovely, tentative way of well-poised women.

“Yes,” said she, with a pleasant sort of smile, not in the least significant of an emotion beyond the commonplace, “the day is fixed. A week from to-morrow; or, as those blessed English say, Wednesday week.”

Miriam, a younger woman, radiant in blonde hair and light-blue ribbons, detained her with an outstretched hand.

“I hope you’ll be happy, dear,” she cried impulsively. “I know you will.”

Julia smiled again.

"Thank you, dear," she answered. "I shall — of course. Good-by."

Midway down the steps the girl arrested her a second time, bending forward with a swift little motion.

"You're going to meet Fielding," she announced in a hasty, impressive whisper. "The author, you know. Stare at him." Then she turned about and went into the house.

Julia went on down the avenue with her swift, assured step, head in air and eyes front, to encounter the man who had been prophesied. He, too, was hurrying ; but she did not, according to advice, stare at him and pass on. She stepped before him and held out her hand. There was mischief in her eyes — bravado, too. Fielding was a tall, well-made fellow with black hair rather iron-gray, dark mustache, and violet-blue eyes. He took off his hat mechanically, and looked at her for an instant, puzzled, before touching her hand.

"'Morning, Ben !'" said she saucily.

His face flushed all over like sudden sunshine.

"By all that's great !" cried he. "Julee !"

She looked at him in silence, and her eyes danced.

"Are you Julee Maynard?" he interrogated.  
"Are you?"

"Yes, if you are Ben Fielding."

"Do you know the taste of cold apple-pie from a dinner-pail?"

"Ay, and cheese in wedges."

"Did anybody ever tie your tail of hair to the chair-back?" He glanced at the little locks by her temple. They had a powdering of gray, and he faltered. But she was used to the gray; it had ceased to daunt her.

"Yes," said she merrily, "and filled my waterproof hood with gravel. And drowned my doll. And put bewildering papers on my kitten's feet. And thou art the man. But we must part; we are obstructors of traffic."

He turned about with her.

"Where are you going?" he asked peremptorily.

"To the station. We live in Linden, thirty miles out."

"Do you take cabs, or cars and things?"

"No; I walk."

"I'll walk with you."

He did not ask whether he might. He knew. They swung off in time down the avenue, and

several persons who knew Fielding looked at him curiously, his face was so alight. He seemed to have come on the recognition of great good fortune.

"Now tell me the whole story," he began, midway in the Garden. "Where did you move? That was about the time I ran away, and brought up at college."

"Out West. I did n't like it much. We tried to grow up with the town, and the town did n't grow. So we came home, and then went abroad. By that time, you were famous."

"Nonsense!" he said, with a frown. "I'm not famous now, and I've passed the line. I'm forty-two. There's no hope for me. Still, for a bound boy, naked of friends and cash, I've no cause to complain."

"At least you are known," said she tentatively, with a pretty little lift of the brows, "and prosperous — and married!"

"I have some local significance," he amended. "I can pay my bills — and I am married."

The last phrase, though she had herself evoked it, she subtly did not seem to hear.

"There was a great outcry in Latham Corners when you ran away," said she reminiscently.

He laughed, with a boy's delight in turmoil, and pride at having caused it.

"Was there?" he asked. "Tell me about it."

They had penetrated the narrow streets leading to the station, and their progress became a continuous dodging of fruit-stands and loafing men. The snow was black down here; it had given way to necessity, and lost its look of miracle. The world hummed with life. All the way there had been keen little commonplaces filled into their talk; but afterwards they remembered only what had touched their intimate selves. They leaped from one life to the other, the inner and that about them, without preamble, like minds accustomed to trot in pairs.

"Well," said Julia, talking in detached phrases, while they picked their steps, meeting and parting at turnings of the way, "we missed you — or I did — that night, when you did n't come home with the cows. The Deacon got them himself at seven o'clock. Was n't he cross? Mad as hops!" She knew she was falling into the vernacular of their youth, and she liked it. When had she felt her head so light, her blood so quick and warm? Spring had come back, and the intangible fragrance of a homely world. A hundred forgot-

ten sensations roused themselves within her, and dashed pellmell into the current of life: the taste of frozen barberries, the smell of apples, the great dramatic stillness of a snowbound day at home. “The Deacon’s jaw was set like a nut-cracker. He did n’t tell until Sunday—you know that was Thursday—and then everybody said you were ‘treated bad,’ and had made way with yourself.”

They had entered the waiting-room.

“But you did n’t wonder,” he demanded, turning upon her. “You knew.”

“I did n’t know,” said she soberly, “not till years after. You put the note too far inside the cover, and I did n’t find it till I had given up expecting it. Then my little niece got into the Third Reader, and wanted to use the book; so I tore off the cover. It was a hackneyed situation, but that’s the way it was.”

“Well!” said Fielding. “Well! you must have thought me a nice chum!”

Her brown eyes had softened almost with a hint of tears, but she laughed, though a little ruefully.

“I did think you were ‘real mean,’” she owned. “That was the way I should have put it then. This is my train. I have n’t a minute to spare.”

She put out her hand, but he did not receive

it with the conventional grasp. He held her wrist lightly, to detain her. There was a keen light in his eyes.

"Julee," said he, "look at Track Nine! Do you see? There's a train in three minutes for the Corners. We could go down there together, look at the old place, walk through the grove, and get back to the Junction at five. You could take your train there, and I should be home in time for dinner."

Her face flushed, and lighted into a beauty he remembered. No one had had so vivid a look. He dwelt on that, and forgot, for an instant, what he had asked.

"I have a mileage," she said irrelevantly, and he was recalled.

He released her wrist.

"Wait," he said. "Stand right here."

In a moment he came striding back with tickets. The decision made, he had accepted it, and having all the ways of men, could dominate the moment with much outward calmness. They walked soberly into the car, and he seated her by the window.

"Did you care?" he asked, under the friendly cover of the starting train.

"Care?"

"Yes, when I went. When you thought I had gone without a word."

She turned and looked at him with a steady frankness.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I cared."

"Did you cry?"

"Lots, my grand inquisitor: rivulets and runnels."

"And you found the note afterwards?"

"Yes, the year after I 'did up' my hair."

"Do you remember what I said in it?"

There was a moment's silence until a brakeman passed, and then she laughed again: this time with some pathos over a grief recalled. "You wrote 'Wife' with a capital!" said she. And they left the note for after-musing.

"Are you ever going to marry?" he asked finally, from an irrepressible curiosity.

"Oh, yes," said she, pointedly in her society manner; "next week."

"Next week? The devil!"

"Oh, no! a gentleman from California."

"How old is he?"

"Fifty-six."

"I knew it! Rich?"

"Yes, moderately, I believe."

"Professional?"

"No,—raisins."

"And you're going there to live?"

"Yes, on Wednesday week."

"Then we'll take our carnival to-day."

"Oh, yes," she concurred, with a beautiful innocence. "That is precisely why we can."

Conversation became a little stagnant after that. The gentleman from California seemed to have arrived, an invisible presence sitting bodkin between them. Fielding hated him. What the lady felt, she did not say. They talked of Fielding's work, his last book, his prospects of being sent to Russia or Japan. But it was a little too much like afternoon tea, and their spirits drooped. Still Fielding blamed no one but the gentleman from California, and ground his teeth. He was used to getting what he wanted; only it sometimes happened that he did not know what he really wanted until it was too late. By and by the train drew up at a bleak little station in an arid plain of snowy fields — Latham Corners.

"By Jove!" cried Fielding, with a sudden access of life, "there's Rufus Gill!"

"No!" She had risen, but she stopped at the next window, for a glance. "It can't be."

"It is."

They descended, and a lank fellow with red hair cropped close and shrewd blue eyes came forward as if to meet them. He wore a buffalo coat, mangy in many places, and a knit comforter, made of primary hues, was wound about his throat. Fielding bore himself gayly. All the irresponsible excitement of the situation had come back to him.

"How are you, Rufe?" inquired he jovially.  
"Give us your fist!"

But the youth was gathering milk-cans with a practiced hand.

"I guess you're off there," he said. "That ain't my name."

"Ain't you Rufe Gill?" Fielding made the concession of his verb to place and time.

The other straightened himself.

"Well, no," said he; "I ain't. But father is."

The two chums looked at each other blankly. Then they broke into laughter.

"We're older than we thought," she warned him.

"Or younger," amended Fielding. "We're minors compared with the son of Rufe. Come!"

They joined hands, and took the snowy road

at a run. Meantime, Gill the younger had come to a realizing sense that this was not the manner of people who, even in summer, alighted at Latham Corners. His hand was on the horse's blanket, and he paused in the act of drawing it off.

"Ride?" he called after them, and Fielding returned boisterously:—

"No, much obliged! Can't stop."

Then the two, breathless, paused in the shadow of the great pines where the snow only sifted and never lodged; they gazed about them in pure delight.

"My God!" said Fielding, and he did not say it irreverently, "to be back here after all!"

"It was not so far from town," she whispered, after a pause. "You could have come any time."

"No, I could n't,—not alone."

They looked and listened as if they were drinking in life and love and youth. The shadows under the trees were miraculously green, translated from the blue of common days. Two or three little soft birds went whirring by. Brown twigs were tracing lovely lines above the snow. Just inside the grove, they knew Clin-

tonia would bloom next year ; there, too, would hang the pink pocket of the lady's-slipper. A thousand crowding memories held them silent.

" You must n't be cold," he said, turning to her at last, with his old-time kindness. It seemed very warm and sweet, enkindled after many years. " Kilt up your petticoats, Missy ! You can walk better so."

" Yes, I will," she returned simply, obeying him as she always had, save when they fought like fierce-clawed animals. " I can take the ribbon off my muff."

It was quite natural to walk along, hand in hand. They had a past, and they had found a present ; but there was no future coming — not even Wednesday week nor Fielding's tête-à-tête dinner with his wife. No one was in the snowy road that day. The ruts had been worn smooth and polished by broad runners, for this was " sleddin' time," and a wholesome hour for hauling ice. There was evidence of bygone work, but no present sign of its warmth and motion. They had found an island where other castaways had lived and left their traces, but which now lay open to no eye save heaven's. The sky was clearest blue ; it burned in its coldness as

the sky of August burns from heat. Fielding looked up at it passionately. He had complained lately that his eyes troubled him a little, from the weakness of overwork; but he thought of that no more. Light was grateful to him; he seemed to himself to be expanding to take it in. The world was very still, too. Fresh from the city as they were, it was a blessedness of some rare sort. All the ideals that belong to a crowded life fell away: all its necessities, too. The clamor of the distance seemed very poor and thin, as it pierced their solitude in a moment of recollection; but soon it came no more. Fielding's thoughts were tumultuous, so that they almost excluded the woman at his side. Thus runs the true marriage, according to the male conception. His mind roves abroad, but only happily so long as he knows the faithful step is at his side, the warm hand soft in his.

Julia walked evenly and well. At a turn in the pine-fringed road, she stopped and looked at him.

"You know what you're going to see," said she breathlessly, "the minute we get round this corner?"

"Of course; the old elm — then the school-house chimney."

"Yes; and Pignut Hill."

"Suppose they 've moved the schoolhouse, or painted it white!"

"Oh, they would n't! That is n't in the nature of things. Come, let 's run, and have it over."

They dashed round the corner, and Julia stumbled into a flurry of snow. He caught her; but neither of them cared, though her boots were caked and her petticoats whitened. The schoolhouse was safe. They stood looking at it as if it had been a temple, a pathetic fondness in their eyes.

"Do you want to go in?" he asked.

"No," she demurred slowly. "At first I thought I did, but I guess not. There would n't be the same maps on the board."

Fielding's eyes had been roving.

"By George!" he said, "do you see that? by the corner of the platform?"

Julia shrank a little. For the moment she felt as if the wraith of his old tyrant might have come to claim him.

"Do you see it? Do you?" he insisted. "It 's the nose of a double-runner. Don't you remember how we used to leave 'em here when we 'd got tired of coasting, and cut across to the pond

to skate? Come on! I'll drag you up the hill." He left her, and ran forward to pilfer their steed — named Victory. "Significant!" he remarked, pointing to the blue letters on their red ground. "I have seen and conquered. I am the man. Get on, and I'll take you up hill."

She looked at him saucily.

"Not I," she laughed. "I'm as strong as you. I go to gymnasium."

Then he entreated.

"Oh, Julee, please! You used to."

So Julia sat meekly down, and he lowered his head and made a dash for the hill. He reached the top, breathless. He had not been to gymnasium, and he was stouter than in the days of roundabouts. But his old cunning had not forsaken him. He could steer a double-runner. They whizzed down like Icarus, with no after-tragedy; and when they slowed at the bottom, Julia only got up while he turned the sled, and then took her sovereign place again. She thought, with a half mirthful, half pathetic smile, all to herself, how stiff he would be to-morrow, how subject to matrimonial oil and flannel; but she did not care. The necessity of the time was her excuse. Over and over they took the hill, up and down, until

their faces tingled and they stamped their aching feet. It was Julia who remembered the clock.

"Our train goes at five," said she falteringly.  
"It's 'after dark.'"

Fielding did not answer, but he drew the sled back to its shelter under the wall. Julia paused, as he left it, to brush a little snow from the cushioned top. She felt as if Fair Ellen might reasonably have kept an affection for Lochinvar's horse. They went away, soberly and slow. Their spirits had sunk with the sun.

"I suppose we couldn't just turn into the cross-road, and look at the horse-sheds?" he coaxed. "I don't care much about the meeting-house, but the third shed was where we ate supper that day, you know, when we tried to run away together."

She shook her head.

"Nor down the cart-path to the Broad Meadow? That's where I set my traps till you made me promise not to."

She laughed, a little sadly.

"You did promise," said she. "But — play it's Judgment Day — did you keep it?"

His quizzical look came back; this was the one that accompanied his after-dinner stories.

"Well," said he evasively, "I did n't set them any more *there*."

They waited at the station, where, for a time, they were all alone. There was little left to say. If old recollection had come thronging back upon them, they might have exchanged a hundred antiphonal "do-you-remembers." But it was not so much that they recalled a past existence as that they were thrown back into it, and welded there so strongly that it seemed now the condition of life itself. Once he turned upon her, with the savageness of forbidden moods.

"Are you really going to be married?" he asked, and the tone held a note of command. She raised her pretty brows a shade.

"Oh, yes," she answered, with some remoteness. "I told you so."

"Next week?"

"Yes; as Rufe used to say, 'This very next week that ever was.'"

"Are you going to be happy?"

She wondered what would be the counter-effect of changing the question into another tense, and inquiring, "*Are* you happy?" but she only answered, still with the same air of elusive

calmness: "Oh, we must n't get into abstractions! In a moment you 'd be asking me what happiness is ; and what could I say then ? We might end with metaphysics and the mediæval schoolmen."

He frowned. He never liked to be rebuffed, and his little friend had not been used to chaff him. The train drew slowly in, and Julia went buoyantly up the steps and into the kerosene-flavored atmosphere. The color was still in her cheeks. Her eyes shone, not only from past delight and exhilaration, but perhaps from an anticipated joy. Fielding bent over and asked irrelevantly :—

"When shall you see him ? "

"Who ? "

"The raisin man."

"To-night," she answered, with a little beat in her voice. "At seven-thirty."

"This very night ? "

"That ever was.' "

"Shall you tell him ? "

"What ? "

"How we ran away ? "

Julia turned about, and looked him full in the face. Mischief shone in hers.

"What a lot of questions you do ask!" she remarked. "You are a Lesser Catechism."

"But shall you?"

"Ah! that's no fair." And he knew she was right.

When their train stopped at the Junction, Fielding not only handed her out, but, with one backward thought of his waiting dinner and his warming slippers, looked across the platform to the track where her car stood waiting. If he went home with her he could get into the city at nine; but he thought of the raisin man, and forbore. His foot was on the lower step. Their hands met.

"Good-by!" said she. But he did not answer. At that instant he was conscious only of moving away from her against his will, and yet sadly and strangely with it. Julia was withdrawing her hand; but suddenly, as if by an overwhelming impulse, she grasped his closer, and began to run a little with the starting train.

"Oh, Ben," she said breathlessly; "there's something I must tell you!"

"Yes! yes!"

"I—care about him. It's not the raisins!"

Their grasp broke, and the train took him away.



# ROSAMUND IN HEAVEN



## ROSAMUND IN HEAVEN

"HEAVEN is not a place," said the preacher.  
"Heaven is within us."

Rosamund was listening, and the words struck her with a significance entirely new. The combination was not unique; but for some reason the force of it appealed to her for the first time and summoned a picture she was never to forget. Her mind expanded as if it inhaled a breath, and she heard no more of the sermon. Her thoughts went sailing away, abandoned to worshipful joy in all the beautiful things on earth and possible delight in that unknown condition we are pleased to call heavenly. Her eyes, fixed on the rose-window of the little church, found the red and yellow of sacred art multiplying strangely in glory and widening into a shining world. Nearest lay the summer fields, rich in clover and conscious of their mystical breast-thrill of germinating seeds; then came the waving trees, in an acme of being and jeweled with nests; the great sky, too, with its infinite treasure of light-hidden

stars. Even more potent than the face of beauty were the chords of an untiring orchestra accompanying the pageant of the year. There was the slow simmering of summer sound, the undertone made by the whirr of little wings and the droning of the bee; and above soared the ever-mounting note of ecstatic bird, conscious only of sunlight and a hope fulfilled; or the whickering neigh of a horse, released from week-day shackles and striking sparks of the desert from the dullness of the hollow ground. The infinitude of the forms of life came upon Rosamund with a glad rush and the strength of new passion. Her soul was for a moment satisfied, as if an infinite river had flowed in upon its thirsty soil.

When Rosamund went home she found her mother, whom she was accustomed to call her Angel, lying against a warm rock in the pasture, her hands clasped under her head in a fashion strikingly girlish in one with gray hair.

"Angel," said Rosamund, "did you know heaven is not a place? Did you know it is within us?"

"Yes," said Angel. "I have known it for a long time. Ever so many years."

“And you never told me !”

“I can’t tell you things till you get to them. You would n’t hear me if I did. I suppose there are exquisite overtones, this minute, in these summer sounds ; yet we are both quite dull to them.”

“What a pity !”

“Oh, no ; nothing is a pity. Everything comes in the end. You won’t have heaven within you so long as you are impatient.”

Silence grew between them, and brought its own gift. They understood quite well that the story of the summer day was far more important than their own poor confidences. Robin, the old white horse, came lounging up to them and poked his gray velvet nose into their laps in search of that sweet morsel which lives mysteriously in pockets. A bee grumbled and bumped about, presumably because they were infringing upon wild land, and might establish a right of way, though no clover cups grew anywhere near, and the milkweed was over the fence.

“Angel,” asked Rosamund, “is heaven within you ?”

“No,” said Angel slowly, but with the utmost certainty, “it is not.”

"Then why is n't it, if you know it might be?"

Angel considered.

"I am not quite sure," she answered. "I think it is chiefly because the Me I call my soul is so tightly bound to other souls. This phase of life—whatever it is—seems to be one where many people are lame and blind and tortured. For what reason, nobody yet knows. Now heaven is bliss; and if I have it within me—if I ceased to suffer any more—why, I suppose I should be separated by a wall or a film from these others whom I love."

"But they could have it within them," said Rosamund. "Only let us not say *within* anybody. Let us just say heaven. That makes it larger. Not a little jewel, like a dewdrop, in our souls, but a great crystal globe, large as the world, large as all worlds, for us to creep—no, to walk into. They could walk into it, too, Angel!"

"Not into mine. Each one would have to enter his own. And sometimes perhaps only the circumferences would touch, and then I should be lonely. I am so timid, Rosamund! I am afraid of only one thing, but I am terribly afraid

of that : of not being near, very near to what I love—of having love wake in the night, and find me so far away in dreams that I could n't stretch out my arms. And if my dreams were all of peace—don't you see that it might be so?"

Rosamund shook her head.

"I don't see," she answered, "why you should n't be able to show them your crystal sphere, and make it so real that they could step right into theirs. For I suppose our heaven is born with us, and is always just beside us, near enough to touch, any time we choose to stretch out a finger. And why should the circumferences be so far apart, if you want to have them near? Perhaps they are like little films, and we are n't a bit less warm to one another or less close, only more shining."

"It may be so," said Angel. "The loveliest thing is always the truest. But I am not adventurous. I like this pasture better than gates of jasper. See this rough blueberry branch, Rosamund. I'd rather have it than flowers of Paradise."

"But I don't suppose there is any greater or less," said Rosamund. "I suppose a flower of

Paradise might be just as homely and beloved as a huckleberry." There she stopped, conscious of her growing pains, and only went on, after long silence, "At any rate, I am going to be in heaven from this time forth."

Angel put out that splendid, warm hand of hers, and they gave the grasp of understanding and fealty.

The summer beat out all its lingering measures, and Rosamund was every day more and more conscious that she had entered heaven. The progress of the year from rose to goldenrod was not more royal than the blossoming in her heart. She seemed to be wrapped in the pride of youth and crowned with the jewel of a perfect joy. The song of her life was inarticulate, the voice of pure emotion, yet it breathed like incense day by day. Rose petals fell beside her, delicate-veined and sweet; the scarlet hips succeeded, and she found one perfect like the other. "Decay is beauty, death is fruition," sang her soul, "and joy is lord of all: only we fear to own him." She attuned her steps to some hidden harmony; she stretched forth her hand in the commonest deed as if to take a scepter. For surely there could be no heaven

without beauty. One should not enter it a pensioner in rags. Who dwelt there must reign. Then came the autumn carnival of color and the falling of leaves, and Rosamund was back again in the city life adorned by books and music. The old, quiet days went on at home, and there were hours spent with Sylvia, who lay in outward serenity on the white bed which had been the pyre of her girlhood joys, and which she was never to leave again. Whenever Rosamund went there in the evening, as she often did, Douglas walked home with her across the park, and she talked to him about her heaven. He knew exactly what she meant. Most whimsical as he was, bitter, sweet-hearted, arrogant, loving, he always knew. Rosamund never guessed that the side he turned toward her was the feminine side, receptive and sympathetic. She thought it was what he offered every one, and that it was the fault of the world that the world also did not see it.

“Angel,” she said, one of these winter days, “I wish we could bring other people into our heaven.”

“Do you?” asked Angel. “Do you, Rose of the World?”

"I began by wishing they could have heavens of their own. But that is n't enough. We need them in ours. Now you are in mine, Angel. You may not get much comfort out of it, but there you are — so near that I could stroke your hair any time, or pass you a thought, like a little warm bird, and have you cuddle it and pass it back, or perhaps let it nest on your shoulder in that nice warm hollow, Angel! But I want Douglas, too, in my heaven ; I want him dreadfully."

Angel glanced at her quickly ; then she looked away.

"Do you ?" she repeated. "I 'm a stupid, useless old thing. I never thought of that."

"Why should you think of it first? But Douglas — I 'm sure he is n't happy. He is so — so bitter. It does n't mean anything. Oh, I know that ! You need not tell me. It 's like a harsh rind ; but it must hurt the growing wood underneath. It troubles me. When I tell him how I love my life, and how wonderful it seems to me, he smiles — so sweetly and quizzically, you know ; he never is like anybody else — and he says : 'That 's because you are so young !' And he is n't old, Angel. He is *not* ! If he would

come into my heaven, I could show him he is not. I often see him there. Sometimes I think of it in the night and laugh out loud, my thoughts are so childish and silly. I see him inside my heaven dressed in white, ‘mystic, wonderful.’ I sing to him, always songs I never have heard (but they come in the night!); and when that little tired frown creeps in between his brows, I carry him cups of something ambrosial. (I say that because ambrosial is such a good word, majestic, large, a word dressed in purple!) But in the night it is all so different, so stately, that when I ask him to drink I say: ‘Will my lord set his lips to the cup?’ Once, Angel, I touched his hair in my dream. But I never shall do that again. It was too solemn. If we take any one like Douglas into our heaven, we must remember he is royal, and treat him so.”

Angel’s own brows were drawn together in the folds of pain. She did not turn to Rosamund in speaking.

“Does any one else sing to him in your dream? Does any one bring him cups of wine?”

Rosamund laughed out full and gayly.

“How should they,” she said, “in my heaven? I could n’t get them in if I tried. I can’t have

anybody but you and Douglas, and I can't have him — the real Douglas — if he won't come."

"This thinking at night, Rosamund — I don't like it."

Rosamund laughed again, in her own dear way.

"Oh," she said, "it's only waking for a minute between dreams! Sometimes I don't know the difference between dream and waking. And now I must go. Sylvia expects me. I'll come home early."

Angel detained her with an anxious hand.

"Do come early," she said, "and don't — but never mind. To-morrow we'll talk again. I wonder I never thought to tell you, Rosamund, that there are reasons for Douglas's growing old before his time. Though he is older than you, child, a good fifteen years; we mustn't forget that. And he is not happy. He has been unhappy so long that he sees the world through a cloud. But to-morrow we'll talk again, and I will tell you what I know, what all of us know but you. No, no, not to-night!" And though Rosamund turned back with her bright, expectant look and her eager "Tell me, tell me!" Angel pushed her off and shut the door upon her. Then, so separated, Angel clasped her hands

tightly and stood still to think it out, while Rosamund went smiling away with that buoyant step of hers which seemed always set to dancing measures.

Rosamund had her little visit with Sylvia, and everything belonging to it was just the same—the white bed, the peaceful dusk broken by flickering of the fire, the faint scent of the roses, carried in to the dressing-room for the night but prodigally casting back their breath. The white square of the window lay on the ceiling, and the fronded pattern of the curtain waved upon it with every breeze. Sylvia had lain here so long, sweet and smiling, that one forgot her life was maimed—one saw the blossom and not the blighted stalk. Surely she would always be here. And Rosamund, bringing with her the brightness of the heavenly vesture she had woven for herself, would come in evening after evening all her life for these sweet, cool droppings of talk, like the fall of a fountain, and afterwards Douglas would walk home with her. Not that she thought all this, but the loveliness and security of life brooded peacefully over her spirit, and she was conscious of the greatness of calm. One definite desire only broke her mood into ripples.

She longed for the morrow and Angel's promised confidence.

She recalled herself with a start. Sylvia was speaking.

"I am going to tell you something. It is about Douglas. I asked him if I might have the telling, and he said yes. I wonder how much you know about Cynthia May?"

"Very little," said Rosamund. "I know she was Niobe for the Statuary Club. I shall never forget her as I saw her that night. But we have n't much every-day acquaintance."

"He was in love with her," went on Sylvia, with happy eyes fixed on the firelight, "long ago, when they were both very young. They were separated. The circumstances were cruel; but we must all forget that now. Only — Douglas never got over the wound. Since she came back here last year he has had to meet her, and he has learned to know her all over again. He finds that she was never to blame, and that she is just as true as he thought her, years ago. And a great deal more beautiful, Rosamund. You can imagine that."

Sylvia waited a moment and Rosamund looked at her. "Yes," she said at length, "yes, Sylvia."

"It was all brought about quite suddenly," continued Sylvia, delighting in her story. "I fancy they were talking together and that it came in a rush and whirlwind, as if an angel of the annunciation swept down and offered them sacrament. Oh, Rosamond, have patience with me! It is so wonderful for Douglas just now, when he might easily have thought life was over. Of course I don't really know how it came about. I am only sure it is perfectly real and true, and that they told each other they cared exactly as much as they had in the beginning. More, I fancy; for, don't you see, it must have grown with their loneliness and suffering. And, Rosamund, he is with her to-night."

Rosamund rose and took up her gloves. "Sylvia," she said, "will you give him a message? Say you told me. Tell him I sent — my love."

"Yes, indeed! and do send a word to Cynthia. Your love? I am sure you know her well enough."

Rosamund had reached the door. "I have n't known her well," she said, "but now — surely. My love." She was outside when she heard Sylvia calling her. "Yes," she answered, stepping back; "what is it, Sylvia?"

"I had forgotten about your getting home. Did you drive over?"

"No, but that cab is at the corner. It always is. Good-night."

"Rosamund," called Sylvia again, "is n't it lovely to think we never can depend on Douglas any more, because he will belong somewhere else? He will have a real place of his own. I won't let myself miss him. It's as if he had gone to heaven."

Rosamund passed swiftly down the stairs and out into the night, brilliant with snow and moonlight, yet warm as it sometimes is, even in mid-winter. There was thaw in the air, and the deluded little watercourses were breaking up under the false dawn of wooing weather. She stood a moment on the steps, drawing her fur cloak about her, with the shiver born of an inward chill. She looked at the cab waiting on the corner, and then turned away from it, across the street and into the little park. She always went home that way when Douglas was with her. Populous in spring evenings with lovers and idlers, it seemed now, in its winter whiteness, a bit of the larger outside world which is the real one to us who would escape ourselves. The snow

lay shapeless and water-soaked about the tree trunks, and the shrubbery rose above it in delicate pencilings of brown. When Rosamund was well within, she stopped and looked about her. She put out her hand and touched a low evergreen branch, grasped it and held it tightly. The prickly contact was good. How poor she was ! She had not even the wings of a dove, to fly away where there were many branches like this, and solitude. Poor little tree, transplanted and too closely tended ! Did it also feel some sharp ache at the heart, hemmed in by walls and the clangor of the streets ? She was standing still when a woman, who had been walking back and forth at a distance, came rapidly toward her. She was veiled and cloaked in black, and as she stopped beside Rosamund, some idle memory flitted through the girl's numbed brain of a tale told her, at second hand, about some terrifying woman of fiction who stopped in a doorway and fanned herself with a small fan.

"Don't be frightened," said the stranger.

"No," answered Rosamund. "Why should I be?"

"You might be because you are young and shielded ; because you don't walk alone at night.

I suppose you are doing it now as a great adventure. You will feel as if you had climbed Mont Blanc. I am doing it because I am in despair. The house was killing me. Faces were killing me—and voices. My own room would have had me crazy in an hour. I came out here to breathe."

Rosamund stood still and held the evergreen branch in her hand.

"What would you do," said the other abruptly, "if you were stopped here at night by a woman betrayed and lost to herself and the world? A poor, vile, besmirched creature—like Rossetti's 'Jenny'? No, you won't have read that. But if there were such a woman, and she said, 'Will you watch with me one hour? I want company before I go back into hell!' What would you say?"

Rosamund dropped the branch and folded her hands before her. "I don't know what I should have said," she answered, "last night, for example, or before any one had spoken so. But now I should say"— She had no words to finish. They all seemed poor and commonplace. She bent forward quickly. "You will be cold," she ended. "Take my arm, and let us walk."

The woman drew a choking breath.

"May I talk to you?" she asked.

"I hope you will," said Rosamund. "Let me be company for you, at least."

They began to pace back and forth; but the stranger had not taken Rosamund's arm.

"You are very noble and very sweet," she began. "But I knew you would be. I have seen you often at concerts and at church. You look like an angel. But that does n't necessarily prove you are one. It may mean that your great-grandmother had a beautiful vision, or heard a fine strain of music. So I didn't know. But when I saw you here, I made up my mind to try you. I have got to confess to somebody, or go crazy this very night. The reeds in the river won't do; they'd say just the same whether I told them my heart was broken or the wind was north. I don't believe in priests. Doctors are good men, but they let the physical account for everything. If they heard Apollo from his shrine, they'd nod and say, 'Hysteria!' And friends! I should see them again, and every look would glass my shame. (Is n't that a good phrase? Do you know enough about phrases, you child, to see how good that was? I can stop to look at it because my brain, like every atom in me, is all alive. It hurts

me, it is working so fast, searing itself with pictures.) Now you never will know me. You never will guess who I am. Will you hear my confession?"

"Don't talk so fast," said Rosamund, touching the woman's hand, as it hung by her side. "It hurts you so."

"No, it only hurts me to keep still. It hurts me to be moderate. And I am very mad now. If you could know about the last two nights! Alone in my room, running back and forth, like a wild thing in a cage (oh, such a little, square cage!), but very softly, so that nobody would hear! Then at last I thought I was crazy, really crazy, and I was glad. I found some flowers and made me a crown, and took up my skirt and danced before the glass. 'Now I am mad,' I said, 'and I shall never feel my curse any more.' But in the morning there I was, as sane as ever, and my last hope was gone. Well, this is it. I told you there were ruined, betrayed women. I am one, too; and it is just as terrible for me as for Jenny, though it is only my soul that has been killed. A man earned my love. I am not the kind of woman that needs to love. I was comfortable. I enjoyed my life. He made me

love him. He took every drop I had to offer. He stamped every fibre of my soul with his own image, and then he threw me back my gifts because he was tired of them. I was ‘exacting’—God knows I was! But I asked of him what he taught me to give. I tired him. I did; I own it. But I was precisely what I had been when loving me was delight and joy and honor. Here I am, dethroned, in rags. I am spiritually undone.”

Rosamund was a tall woman, and suddenly she turned and gathered the other into her arms. She laid her cheek passionately against the stranger’s hidden face.

“You must believe,” she said. “We must believe.”

The stranger spoke harshly, though she clung to Rosamund, and the passion of the movement defied the coldness of her tone.

“Are you going to repeat the Anglican creed?”

It seemed like divine suggestion.

“I believe in God!” began Rosamund, scarcely knowing what she said. “I believe in love!” she ended joyously.

“In love! It is a devil. Drink of that cup and you drink to your own damnation.”

"Oh, wait, wait!" said Rosamund, holding her still. "I may not be able to tell you, but I know the secret. Love is greater than any circumstance or any expression. And love is not taking; it is giving. If he has betrayed you, pray night and day for him that he may learn what love really is. We must give and give. Oh, what difference does it make whether we have or whether we are denied?"

The woman was shaking with great breaths. She put her arms about Rosamund. "Good-by," she said. "The minute is over. Tell me I am shrived."

Rosamund began speaking rapidly. She wanted to pour out all her precious ointment, yet she knew there was nothing to say. "It is everywhere—love. My dear, my dear! I can't think of any word near enough to call you. I want to *be* love to you. I want to stop your pain. Oh, I know now what pain is! My God! I know! I will pray for you always and remember you"—

"People are coming," said the woman hastily. Her voice was broken. "Listen, dear! I am crying. It is so good not to be afraid I shall scream. One word: promise me you will send

me your love in your thoughts for one week. Just before you go to sleep."

"Yes! yes!" said Rosamund, and the other dropped her hand and hurried away. Rosamund did not look after her. She, too, sped across the park and up the hill. "Angel, I am here," she called, as she passed the chamber door.

"But how late you are! Let me look at you. Rosamund, this time you have really been in heaven!"

"I forgot it," said Rosamund. "My heaven? My *own* heaven? I don't believe I shall ever think of it again."

She turned away to her own room, where it would be dark and still.



**THE END OF THE GAME**



## THE END OF THE GAME

"You really can't rouse me to much enthusiasm over the short story," she continued. "I know all you would say of it,— perfect of form and sonnet-like in finish,— 'yet I am well.' Any man may wear its laurels, and I envy him not. But when it comes to the literature of correspondence, then I confess to coveting the crown. I would rather have written a series of fascinating letters than all the short stories of the decade."

"Do it," said he. "Put your next novel into epistolary form."

"I might — and fail more signally than ever in making my characters real. Letters, of all things, must be written from the heart. Fancy the tone of Swift's if he had been told he must correct the proofs on some day of reckoning."

"The heart is a fiction in literature. We all know what bang-up work has been done with the avowed purpose of making money, and by men who would n't have touched pen to paper without that ignoble spur."

"You are a pagan!"

"You are a sentimentalist! No; you are simply 'pure womanly.' You can't imagine desires fulfilled without æsthetic cringings and moral winces."

"Nothing of the sort; but I do own that I could n't play dummy in a series of letters."

"Then — collaborate."

"With whom? Some gifted ghost? Prosper Mérimée's?"

"With me. We say good-by to-morrow, after a charming summer acquaintance of six weeks. You leave this hotel, and go back to your Bohemian Boston attic. I return to New York and journalism. Now, let us assume a situation. I am madly in love with you. Don't start! How undramatic you are! You — there my invention halts, though it is easy to see there would be no story without an obstacle. What shall it be, — your engagement or mine?"

"I am to choose the fetters? That's generous. But I won't take the hackneyed obstacle of 'another,' thank you! Somebody always has to descend to bathos or perfidy, in order to extricate himself. No; let's pretend that we are conscious of a mutual attraction, but don't in the least sat-

isfy each other's ideal of what a man and woman ought to be."

"Do forgive me for saying how truly Bostonese and priggish!"

"Shall I be suburban and flippant? Well, there are dozens of possible situations. Take your choice. Disgrace — my great-uncle has cheated the widow and the orphan, and then shot himself."

"No drawback at all, unless you get up some sort of moral scruple about returning the spoils. That would bore me unspeakably. I should reply only by post-card."

"Hereditary feud — though in that case we should have to join hands in the regulation manner, and satisfy tradition. My fancy is at sea; you propose something."

"Consumption and insanity have been done to death. You might be devoted to a cause, and refuse to give it up for absorption in one man."

"Hundreds of women have fought, bled, and died over that, from 'The Princess' down. Best of all, why not begin the correspondence, and let it wander at will?"

"Excellent! We will merely draw a heavy line under the fact that I am in love with you.

Remember to write on one side of the paper only. It will save us a deal of copying."

"Yes; and send the letters flat in large envelopes. Then we need only number them, lay them aside, and they are ready for the printer. But I predict a bar to perfect satisfaction in the completed work. Did you ever yet write a clever thing without having some Paul Pry accuse you of lending it from your personal experience?"

"Never; and I anticipate your conclusion. No matter how much the all-knowing public clamors for 'author,' we will lie low and confess nothing. But if it actually does find us out, I will claim the woman's part, and you shall have the man's."

"Clever, indeed; but bold to a 'bragian' degree! Well, say what you like. I will at least deny nothing. How often shall we write?"

"Every day, by all means. I have some important work coming on in December, and I should like to finish this episode of the heart before then. By the way, remember to make no allusion in the letters to the fact that we are playing a game. Let us dress for the part, deceive ourselves into all possible earnestness, and see what swagger things we can do."

In a month the correspondence was in full swing, and, omitting the letters which served as prologue, thus it ran :—

HE.

Your yesterday's letter probed my armor at a hundred points. I have loved other women, you say ; what, more or less, does it mean when I declare I love you ? It is true, I have had my dreams and passions, though I object to posing as that species of hero who is not only beautifully Byronic, but truly unwholesome. I am the average man, with a sense of the ideal and a poetic imagination. Therefore have I idealized woman, and to idealize is to love. I loved my cousin May. She grew up and away from me, and married somebody else. She was a bonnie bride — God bless her ! — and meeting her to-day is as commonplace as reading the weather probabilities. Two years after, I wrote sonnets to a woman who never guessed them to be from what I am pleased to call my soul ; and this summer, when you met me, I was engaged. You have not seen her, but you have heard of her — a gentle, domestic creature, who would have made me half happy and supremely comfortable.

She guessed at my having fled from you because I dared not trust myself to stay, and gave me my freedom. She is no less tranquil, and I am her everlasting debtor. What then? "If these things be so," you say, "what can love mean? What do you give me more than the others? How do I know whether the jewel is mine own, not only to have, but to hold?" You speak like one born yesterday, or as a child forlornly strayed out of Arcadia into these solid streets. Have you yet to learn that a relation must be judged, not by its length, but by its perfection? When I sat with you those moon-fed nights, while the sea washed the rocks at our feet, and we had no need of talking because our thoughts ran together like heavenly horses of the sun, what then? Do you think such communion is often duplicated? Does one find a diamond more than once in a lifetime, or see the perfect arch of the rainbow twice in a summer? Why will you so fatally pull open the petals of this heart-flower, to count the stamens, and determine whether it conforms to this or that classification? You know me—the average man. Such as I am, I am yours. If you challenge me to the clearest truth I know how to utter, I confess that I know nothing about

eternity, and care less. I ask you to walk step and step with me through this troublous world ; and if, some fair morning, I should wake and see your face beside me in that other land charted by theologians and poets, why, then, I 'll give you merry greeting ! But as to swearing that I shall love you eternally, how do I know ? I would have sworn it, had we met ten years ago. Now the days, inexorable "daughters of time," have brought me wisdom, and I see that our affections are indeed "tents of a night." But passing fair they are, and I prithee, sweet mistress, let me rest in mine undisturbed. You women expect of men a fantastic and impossible loyalty — a loyalty consecrated to keeping a niche vacant for you until you come, and making life forever sterile after you go. God knows your scheme might be a happy and heroic one for some unknown world, made on a different plan ; but not in this — not in this ! We are growing and changing creatures, like our brothers, the trees. Year by year we put forth shining buds, and renew ourselves in the sun and cherishing air. There *were* birds in last year's nests, I tell you plainly ; but now they are gone. Shall my leaves whisper above the poor little brown dwell-

ings with no desire to see them warm again with life? Perish the thought! — since change is being and standstill means decay and death. You are the choice of my prime. Why deny us both our happiness because you cling too long and closely to the dreams of youth?

## SHE.

When I read a letter like your last I almost hate you. Fortunately — or the reverse, according as you value my toleration — you do not fall into the Goethean platitudes that would force me to remove myself forever from the risk of hearing them. You are not absolutely blasphemous. You do not say, in so many words, that love is a succession of fancies and phases ; and so I am sorry for you without actually despising you. For, believe me, my friend, it is true that though men do not die of love, they should think it possible.

Though, if I deny you, in a year you will have loved again, you should be swearing to me and to yourself that, without me, in your own proper person, you die. And I should know you would not die, and you would know I knew it, because we are neither of us at the morning of life, when wishing brings the boon ; but we should be a

little nearer heaven than we are now. For I, alas ! doubt you, and you can analyze yourself and me. So, farewell, — nay, rather, honest, plain good-by. May all the gods be with you, — for I will not. You need them, and you do not need me more than another.

## HE.

Now, by all the powers that rule this curious modern world of analysis and cross-analysis, or occupy their Olympic leisure in bringing about the madness of our day, it shall not be good-by ! The gods shall be with me, but only to fight on my side, not to console me for a victory lost. Poor child ! you can't help your temperament, can you ? No more can I mine. But yours is the greater curse. You are stung by the gadfly of the ideal, and you are fated to rage through life in search of the perfect love, a perfect lover. Diogenes himself, old prince of visionaries, was moderate in comparison. You should have lived in a day when I could have claimed your hand through battle with a hundred knights ; when your favor would have had baptism of blood, and I could at last have come begging home from Holy Land to die at your

feet. You would have canonized me then, in your maiden calendar, with the same single-mindedness and fervor which had inspired you when you buckled on my armor, and sat at prayer and tapestry while I fought the heathen host. And since you are denied that musty path, you would fain invent wild beasts and paynims of the mind for me to conquer. I must play with you a poetic drama of love, overleap obstacles, and dissect my heart and yours, to find the tissues homogeneous. And I would do it, if there were no other way of winning you. I am but a man, an actor in this merry game of life, and I could well play such a pretty interlude, if needs must. But I should do it only under protest, as one might snatch a glove from the arena. Realities far better serve my mood, and I'd rather sit down with you to one of those flashing hours of lightning speech than rhyme you "love" and "dove" by the ream, and swear I slept not since I saw you last. Heaven save us ! it's an easy part to play. Listen ; this is how Strephon would woo you — Strephon who has never loved before, and never will gaze on woman's face again while you and he shall live ; nay, who will be constant beyond the stars ! —

"Last night I could not sleep. The minutes whispered of you, the hours struck your name." (Poor metaphor: but Strephon's metaphors *would* be poor. You find such romantic bathos only in combination with intellectual poverty.) "At midnight I rose, and looked at the moon sailing her sea of blue. Immeasurably far" (or do they know her distance?), "she was yet nearer than you; for no intelligence of the night would bring me news of you. Were you wakeful, and did your thoughts turn burningly to me, as mine to you? or did you wander lonely in dreams whither I could not follow? O most dear, jewel of the earth and desire of all the winds of heaven that dare to touch your cheek, one word, I pray you, or I die!"

Do you like it? The style is fatiguing, and the subject-matter, feeble as it is, a tax on the imagination; but I can turn out such stuff by the quarto volume, and perhaps I could even talk it on a rainy day, when you had lighted my pipe, and I was disposed, like a kindly lord, to humor you. Dost like it, I say, and wilt have more to-morrow? But whatever thou wilt have, be assured that I will have thee from henceforth and—nay, I cannot say forever, for that would

be pure folly, and an arrogance at which Jove laughs.

SHE.

Why do I answer a letter like that — not even earnest, but jeering at me and the holiest of my dreams? I do not know, except that I seem to myself too hopelessly under your influence to cut this knot at one stroke, as a more heroic woman might. And that brings me to another reason why I should not be to you what we both have hoped. I have accused you of not loving me. I come now to the doubt whether I in the least love you. That you attract me, I grant you, and that the attraction is so strong I can hardly withstand even your written words, I allow with shame; but that I love you — no, I am not sure of it. What have we in common? I am trying to stumble into the path of the ideal, and you are contenting yourself with a daily carnival of intellectual pastimes, with flashing lights and glowing flowers. I want to bind my hopes to emotions that are imperishable, and relations that are infinite; you are content to take the joy of the flying hour, and pledge yourself to no more arduous task than that of making it your own. You disappoint me at every turn, and yet you

fascinate me. As I write, the ring of your voice, the remembrance of that look you threw me when you rode away,—for your eyes could laugh because the sky was blue and the air soft, and mine were heavy with tears since I must lose you,—the very thought of your presence so besets me at times that I whisper the air to carry you the message, “I am yours.” But, after all, I am not. An inner self — a dissenting, stern, and resolute self — says “No ;” and I cannot yield. Oh, if you but guessed it, I had been easily won before I knew you so truly ! Had you been less honest, — less insolent, I might write, — had you paid me the compliment of lying to me, you might, I say, have won me ; but I suppose I shall some day thank heaven you did not choose. That you could stop in the midst of a letter to the woman you profess to love, and interpolate a travesty of honest emotion — oh, it sickens me ! Let us write no more. What have we to say ? For you there are a thousand pleasure-paths, since, as you own, you have an idealizing nature, and there are thousands of women for you to idealize. I am but a throbbing line in your spectrum of life. As for me, perhaps I can some day be wholly thankful that

I did, though with breaking heart, choose the highest. Do you remember Guinevere's self-despairing cry, —

"I should have loved the highest"?

Do you remember how Maggie Tulliver turned from Stephen, not alone because he was bound to her cousin, but because the nobler part of her never responded to his call? I do not court martyrdom with these; but I stretch out my hands to them for help in this stress and trouble of my life, that their memory may give me strength. Do not answer this. Why should we spar? To you it may be intellectually amusing; to me it is agony.

#### HE.

My child, you never gave me so much joy in your life. You say I am fascinating to you. I make my lowest bow, and respond that you are infinitely charming to me. What more do we ask? Love is but a mystical attraction, and there is scarcely one chance in a million that either of us finds in another the mysterious soul-likeness or soul-difference which draws us now together. I consider myself, so to speak, a saturated solution. (Did David Copperfield say

that before me?) I can conceive that I might adore some other order of being more than I adore you; but it is not within the remotest possibility that I shall meet such a being during the next fifty years, and at the end of that time I shall be dust. Therefore we are quite safe, and let us haste to the wedding. By the way, I met Aunt Elizabeth to-day, and told her we are to be married in the spring, and she proposed having some jewels set for you. I could give you dozens of toothsome little items like this, if you did n't keep me so busy writing about the state of my soul, or wildly defending myself from the charge of having one. But I implore you, as a friend,—nay, as a lover, whose peace of mind should be precious to you,—not to mix our affairs with those of bogies out of books, like Guinevere and the Tullivers. Why drag them forth to daunt me? I shudder when you tacitly command me to put on buskins and copy some hero of tragic story. Much as I delight in your letters, I tell you frankly they make me nervous. I feel as if I must respond in blank verse, and my muse has been halt and blind this many a year. You have criticised me tremendously, my lady, for the last three weeks. I am going to retaliate, and en-

large upon your greatest fault. Neither wince nor fear me ; 't is not that you are not fairest, virtuousest of your sex : but that you have no sense of humor. If you had, you would appreciate that neat little bit in my last — the one about Strephon. I consider it a clever interpolation ; but you, being, as I say, destitute of humor, count it a blasphemy against the Unknown Eros. (And let me tell you that Eros, in his best estate, does a precious deal of laughing. He is nut-brown and rosy, and I shouldn't wonder if he were fed on strong ale and meat, instead of sweets and syllabub.) Think not, though, that I love thee less for thy foolish seriousness, for in that thou art the more feminine. No woman yet ever had a man's sense of humor without losing some aroma of her sex, priceless beyond jewels. And so I do not accuse you because I would have you other than you are, but that you may say to yourself, when you do not approve me, "It is because, being a man, he sees the strange, jagged edges of events, and the way they fit into each other — the awful incongruousness of life ; he smiles over the grim irony of the game, and smiles where I should pray." You will keep on striving for the impos-

sible, seeking the gold at the end of the rainbow; and I shall pore over the pebbles at my feet, in search of some more shining than the rest, to build into our garden wall. We will still be different, but alike in that we love each other.

HE.

(*Telegram.*) Are you ill? Why do you not write?

SHE.

(*Telegram.*) I am quite well. Letter follows.

SHE.

MY FRIEND : My last letter tells you my reason for not writing. How could you have misread it or forgotten? I said then that we have nothing in common,—that we must part. What could I add? There was no need of further valedictory. Yet if there be need, let me say now that I wish you all good, all happiness and peace. I am your friend. . . .

HE.

The strikes are making dramas at every street corner. I am out all day, and writing leaders at night. It's a tremendous chance to do splendid

work, but I shall throw it up and go to you if I don't hear by the next mail. What right have you to withdraw from your bond? You are mine, I tell you! I can't stop to argue, with socialism pulling at one sleeve and love at the other; but — come! stand up like a man, and tell me you love me. I challenge you!

## SHE.

Do not think of coming to me when you can march in the van of a movement like this, and throw one influencing note into the uproar of voices. I think of you as Taillefer before Hastings; and the struggle of class to-day is no less tremendous than that between races eight centuries ago. Oh, that I too were wise enough to tip the scale by a hair! But I am not, and therefore I joy in knowing that I have a friend in the field, and that he will fight for me. Of course I shall write to you. There is no bar to friendship between us; but with that line we stop. We have been foolish in attempting to cross it; and having seen our mistake, we remain henceforth in the level meadows on the hither side of prudence. Beyond were mountain-tops of exaltation (so we thought) and valleys of despair, as

one of us found ; but here there is peace. Let us talk no more of our futile dreams, but, if we do write, speak only of the problems of this great day — so dark, yet so sure to burn away its clouds. I read eagerly everything you send me. Your last article seemed to me perfect, broadly humanitarian, and yet full of the keenest common sense. Your sarcastic mirroring of the pure philanthropist, "the merely good, who constantly needs the supervision of the truly wise," may be — must be — true. I acquiesce, because you are a student and I am not ; but at each word I shrink for fear the next will prove you scoffer and cynic. But it does not. I can believe that you are standing the test of sentimentalist and statistician, and — emptiest and most delusive of honors ! — are making a name. But to me it is far more that you fill a place in the surging ranks of this ill-trained army of men, and I send you Godspeed.

HE.

I have mailed you a bundle of papers. They will show you what I have been about ; for my arm is so tired with writing facts, and my brain with matching them, that I shrink from going over the story again, even in a letter. There is, as

you will see, a lull. The social caldron is not seething over just at this minute, though the dregs are still agitated. Last night I took my first breath of real rest and relaxation: on my way home, dead tired and too excited to sleep, I saw a light in Mary Wilbur's windows. To speak tersely, as becomes one who has written facts and figures for the last week, she is the woman who broke her engagement with me a few months ago. I rang the bell, and was admitted. She and her mother keep house, in an exquisite fashion, in a little apartment. They were there by the fire — two gentlewomen who, it seemed to me, having no workaday men to wait for, should have been in bed hours before. But "we were talking," said the mother, and the younger woman only smiled a welcome, and busied herself, in a gracious way, in serving a little supper for me. Well, the repose of it all! This, it seemed to me, was the true meaning of the *ewig weibliche* — grace, beauty, poise, without anxiety for the way the battle of life is turning, without undue stress over anything: simple bloom and delight in blooming, like that of the wilding rose. Sometimes, when I have been fighting a grimy world-battle, like that of last

week (wherein I am afraid I was not so much inspirer and leader as you think), some phase of the æsthetic side of life strikes me with such power that I faint and sicken under my longing for it ; the reproachful clarion-cry of pure beauty comes across the murky, mob-peopled wilderness of life like a silver trumpet-call. Then nothing seems of value but peace — the peace born of innocence, and not of battles fought or dreams outgrown ; and I long for a new life, a new land, unpolluted by utilitarian desires. And all this because two women stayed me with flagons, and talked musically and low, with fine cadences, of a struggle that seemed to them, as then to me, afar and vain.

I ought to be able to describe Mary Wilbur, but I cannot so subtly that you would not think her commonplace. Her eyes are deep, not bright ; her hair is an honest brown ; her walk would never enslave the eye, though every movement tells. But she is so finished, so harmonious ! You know good breeding is sometimes a matter of inheritance, and again of imitation and constant self-counsel. With her, I believe fine manners to be but the index of her finer soul. It is not even necessary to know her well in order

to swear that she never had a thought which would not be beautiful as a flower if it suddenly bloomed into speech. You will say my head is light from wakefulness and weariness, and perhaps you will be right. Yet my soul speaketh as it speaks seldom to any one, and I dare tell you exactly how the beauty and harmony of things have stirred me, and made me long for joy, contentment, peace.

Good-night! Tell me you understand this side of me as well as the hard-headed one that writes leaders and compels in you an admiration for which I don't care a pin. Tell me you understand the real ego, who is himself of the private opinion that he is a bubble, iridescent here and there as he reflects the sun, and speedily to be resolved into nothingness by some wind of fate.

SHE.

No, I do not understand that side of you ; but why should I ? One hardly expects understanding of the emotional nature from a woman who is in the stress and storm of life, and would not be elsewhere. I am not harmonious, nor am I full of repose, nor do such graces appeal to me when they are the mere results of ignorance and youth,

and not of peace attained through strength and wisdom. Yet now I remember you did not ask me to admire this glittering broidery of life, but only to sympathize with you for being dazzled by it. At least I am glad you find such perfect understanding, and I hope you will see Miss Wilbur often. One can easily read your need of relaxation after so severe a strain.

## HE.

*O femina!* — I will not complete the quotation, since it would be manifestly inapplicable. It is your vice, methinks, that you are not more fickle and changing, and one that brings you much discomfort. For if, instead of marching with head erect in the van of your army of ideas (and just and right they usually are), you could take little side excursions with me into the foolish realms of fancy, you would be far happier. But, to return to the apostrophe, abstract of all mystery, with which I began this letter : let me go on from there, and charge you with the most egregious inconsistency ever perpetrated by your sex. For, not many days ago, you did accuse me of lacking ideality and pure sentiment ; and now, when I kick up my heels and prance about

the pastures of No Man's Land, you do coldly inform me that I am incomprehensible. Prithee, tell me why? Though to-day I am no such man, and can smile at the mood I was in that night. Throughout the last twelve hours I have behaved as becomes a good citizen, and one that might be alderman an the fickle mob would elect him. First, I held a knock-down battle with an apostle of the single tax (I will not say who was worsted); then I talked with some boys (nay, children — for they were but twenty-one) who are going to reform the world, and bring out a political magazine, and told them how futile and fond all such nonsense is, and that, if they would not have their lives wasted, they should spend them on some form of art, ending on the rhetorical peak:—

“The bust outlasts the throne;  
The coin, Tiberius.”

Then I lunched royally, as one may who has earned much by telling his unwashed brother how to live cleanly and godly; took a middle-aged nap; met Mary Wilbur by chance, and walked with her, soothed anew by her violets' fragrance, and the sweet seriousness of her smile; and dined out — by the way, taking her in to dinner.

Now, listen to me ; this letter-writing is fit only for Tantalus. Of course I own it preferable to nothing at all ; but time is flying faster than it was in old Herrick's leisurely day, and I am impatient. When will you marry me ?

## SHE.

When will I marry you ? *Never!* I have told you so before ; but I tell you so now in a passion of rage at myself for giving you a chance to ask me again, even in so perfunctory a way, and at you for daring to do it. You fill your letters with pæans over the beauty and grace of a woman you professed to love only a few months ago, and then, almost in the same breath, you ask me to marry you ! Never — never ! Yet perhaps I need not deny you thus passionately. It may be that you feel yourself tacitly bound to me, and ask in order that I may give you a welcome release. I wish you well. Good-by.

## HE.

Here is an end of trifling for you and for me. You profess to treat life more seriously than I, and yet you dare juggle with it. Stand up before the bar of truth, and answer me. Do you love

me? Yes or no! Not with any sophistical quibblings as to whether I am stable or fickle, good or bad, Philistine or poet. Do you love me — *me* — the me whom you would walk with and talk with, smile at and weep over, if you were my wife? Then, having answered that question as your own honor will have it, ask yourself what it is, in the face of a great fact, a great life-tide like this, if I do tell you a woman is pretty, is sweet, is pleasant. You are you, and I am I; and I call upon you to swear yourself mine. Love is not love that wastes itself in sophistry and shamblings. If you think me weak, why, love me all the more. If I am fickle, wait — if you believe so in eternal passion — till, even after a thousand deflections of fancy, I return to you, though on some other star. *If*, I say; but I pledge you my fealty with the breath of a man, and not a dastard. Therefore, do you now gird your soul with virgin armor, lay your hand in mine, and meet life's imps and goblins at my side. You would have faced the wild beasts of the forest with me if we had lived in knightly days; but you do fear the unsubstantial psychological spirits that haunt a complex civilization. Are you jealous of Mary Wilbur? She is a sweet woman, but she is not for me, nor

am I for her. One question, one answer, settle the status of our little world. Do you love me? For if you do, I shall go down to see you to-morrow night; and when I can once look into your eyes, I defy you to tell me anything but the truth.

SHE.

*Then, come!*

Her answer! It found him standing at the hall door, his mouth set in hard lines, impatience burning in his eyes. He was ready, even to his greatcoat and gloves, for going into the country at the summons of another woman, the one to whom he had been engaged for five years, and whom he had not seen for more than a twelve-month. He was waiting only for this final letter, and when it came he tore it open, read the two words, and crushed the paper in his hand. He stood there for a moment, undecided, immovable.

At length —

“God help us all!” he said, under his breath. “Does she mean it, or is it a part of the game?”

The clock struck. Still he waited, deep in wretched thought. Now the hands of the time-

piece pointed to a moment so late that, whichever way his decision might lead him, it must be followed quickly. He thrust the crumpled note into his pocket, seized his bag, and ran.

## **THE MIRACLE**



## THE MIRACLE

THE house on the border of the lake had been "the studio" when Latham used to go there, before his marriage, for a summer's sketching. Now it was his home and he lived in it, with Gaspard to do the work. To the farmers who saw Gaspard, in his sparing trips to the village, he was "dumb Gasper," who had an unreasonable habit of silence, yet who knew intimate secrets of fishing and hunting, and would betray none of them to sportsmen from far-away places, though they offered big bribes for services. No one quite understood how his reputation had spread so far; but the world had taken note of it, and two or three times he was actually found and the question of hire put to him; but he had melted away into green coverts and made his flight his answer. To Latham, now that he had broken nearer ties, Gaspard was the world and all humanity. His silence was not willful dumbness; it was the reserve learned from living among things larger than himself. His understanding and sometimes his speech were those of a man

of breeding ; his habit in service was perfect in its restrained humility.

It was the early December dusk, and the cabin was sombre with shadows, save about the fire-place, where they leaped responsive to the flame. Latham was stretched on the worn leather couch, his arms under his head, watching Gaspard moving like a gnome back and forth from the brightness into the dark. The old man was not tall, but he had great strength. His aquiline nose and small bright eyes were birdlike, and his skin was weather-worn ; over the hard muscles the flesh looked like leather stretched on steel. Gaspard was unrolling a long parcel taken from a box in a cool corner under the eaves. First there was cloth, and then paper, tissue-paper, crumpled as if it had seen service, but still white.

“It is the candle, m’sieu’,” he volunteered, answering Latham’s comprehending gaze.

This was the second Christmas of their stay together, and a candle, the mate of this, had appeared the year before ; yet Latham responded as if the story of it were still partly strange to him. He knew how the old man’s reticent fancies stirred on this one night ; it seemed niggardly to deny them utterance.

"Your sister sent it to you," Latham prompted.

"My sister, yes, m'sieu'. She lives down there by the sea. She is very old — like me. We are twins. It is not reasonable for twins to live so long. They should divide the years between them. But my sister stays outdoors all day, sometimes all night. Like me, she is a savage. Only it is by the sea."

"And she makes the candle."

"She gathers berries in the summer-time, m'sieu', and makes the tallow. Smell, m'sieu'." He brought the candle gravely over to Latham's couch. It was a tall candle, smoothly moulded. He stood waiting in satisfaction while Latham took it and inhaled the bayberry.

"She makes two candles," he continued. "One is for her, one for me. To-night we burn them. To-night we are together."

"You hear the wind in the pine tops, and she hears the sea," said Latham, with the freedom of oblique speech made possible by Gaspard's reserves. It was like talking undisturbed to his own mind.

Gaspard was busy fitting the candle into a support of cedar wood. When it was safely upright, he placed it on a little stand in a dark corner.

"It is not much to do, m'sieu'," he said suddenly, standing off to true it by his eye, "to spend all summer making two candles. But it is enough."

"Yes, Gaspard, it is enough."

Gaspard lighted the candle with a slow precision governed by a touch of ceremony. Then he regarded it for a moment, and his lips moved. Latham judged he might be recalling some prayer devoted to the season, and turned his glance away. But in a moment Gaspard was beside him. He looked unmoved, though his eyes were perhaps brighter than before.

"I am going out, m'sieu'," he said.

Latham had a feeling that Gaspard plunged into the woods at the crisis of an emotion, to breathe again and recover his self-mastery. Perhaps, too, in this trysting with his twin, he could find her better through the dark.

"I'll watch the candle," he responded, and Gaspard noiselessly was gone.

Latham lay there, the fire leaping in the foreground of his vision, but his eyes following past it and fixed upon the candle gleam. Quiet fell upon him. It was not content. It was acceptance of the lot circumstance had forced upon

him, illuminated now, for the moment, by this pale radiance. It seemed, by some unconscious process, to bring him nearer the life from which he was cut off — the life of homes and certainties — because he shared through it a custom of the earth. All the world this night burned its Christmas candle. With a sudden resulting thought of his only neighborly suggestion here, he got up, and putting his hands beside his face, looked out across the frozen lake. He breathed contentedly. The light was there. It burned, as it did nightly, from the one house in his direct range, an old tavern turned into a private dwelling, and remote from the village as it was from him. But solitary as he lived, by his own will, he had grown to depend on that lonesome light. It had a vague constancy. Now, as the candle was a nearer star, this was a far-off one in the early dark.

He went up to the candle to regard it for a moment, and lay down again, his gaze still dwelling there. Then, as he had resolved not to do, but as he did at moments of involuntary stress, he began to think about his parting from his wife. It was an old habit. Over and over he had traversed all the paths that led to it; now

they were worn and stale. They had met too late, he and Winifred : not too late for tempestuous passion, but late to turn their steps into those ampler fields young love is destined for. Young love is rich. It can afford to spend itself in the fury of its own egotism, and then equalize its pulses and still them to content. Habit has years to form in. But Winifred and he had met when she was thirty-five and well equipped for all the customs of a complex life, and he was older. She had her ambitions, her brilliant sophistries, her mobile fiats on the possibilities of woman's destiny : he had his work, and the habit of devotion to it. He was, he told himself now in humility, a man to live the hermit life and paint pictures in it : not one to invade a woman's kingdom and rule, prince consort, there. It had been a sharp warfare between them, and the more terrible that she fought it for his sake alone. All her ambitions turned his way, like a too hot sun, scorching, not fostering. Or they were like a rain well meant to bring his buds to bear, yet flooding them to ruin ; or an earth too rich for wholesome nourishment. Instead of a painter who had, in silence and almost the secrecy of nature, built up a

name for her pride to rest in, a man who had lived much in the woods, and come back now and then bringing green leaves with him, what had she tried to make of him? She had sought to train his natal honesties for social courts. She had tried to supplement the shyness of his art by fine expedients. He had earned his fame. She would have had him wear it like a medal. And meantime her rich, swift nature was choking him like the vine invading the tree that was growing straight and tall before, its clean, firm leaves too sparse to heed the wind. In that year with her he had ruled an alien kingdom : her own, not his. The silence that covered his working force, his reserves whereunder art lay fructifying, seemed at last to her a constraint, willful and hostile. He was not happy, and she saw it. Then came the night it hurt him to remember, like a blow on naked nerves. He refused now to recall the words that indexed cruel certainty, but he felt still how they bit. The woman there before him seemed not to be his wife. She was an imperious changeling. Strange forces had laid hold on her. He could see her now with the artist's eye of unrelenting accuracy — as faithful as still water giving back a dreadful image —

as she walked up and down the room, reproaching him for his silence, his deadness to what pleased her, his scorn of the world's usages. He had not spoken. Again he was the alien prince, condemned by the queen consort before his exile. Then, when she had finally set her own discontent in the mould of an eloquent fury, he had proposed to end what lay between them. They had made the common mistake — they had lashed together two warring temperaments. But they were not answerable to other people ; they could invite a remedy. He would go back into the woods, to paint. That reason would save her from plausible inventions.

The next day, when he went, there were but few words uttered. They were gentle words, such as are spoken by friends who love no more ; but the faithful artist's-eye told him she looked smitten, and that always hurt him, like a separate scourge of memory ; it was the index of his failure. For however his achievements were regarded among men, he knew he had taken a woman's lot and bungled it by ignorant usage. His hands, deft as they were with brushes, had been too clumsy for wielding anything so fine. If they had been stronger, cleverer, he might

have moulded his own life to fit hers ; as it was, there had been nothing but to part, and let her achieve what was left her of her brilliant destiny. And for him, there was work and the desolation of a day on which the dusk had fallen too soon. When he came back to the woods, he had summoned Gaspard, his guide and comrade, and they had taken up their old free life together. In the manner of men who are stricken, he had worked the harder. Because he was crippled, he had striven the more desperately to keep in the path that once had been so smooth to tread. Life there had been an Atalanta flight ; now it was a march to solemn music. In the months he had been away from her, he had wrought like an artisan. The piled canvases showed it. He had exhibited nothing, because as yet the wound in him was too raw even for the breath of praise ; but here were the pictures : the earth with the face of winter, summer, spring. They were the record of long tramps, of weeks of camping in the farther woods, of dewy leaf and twilight mysteries. He had copied the page faithfully, and now at once it seemed in vain. He had stanchéd his hunger of loss by toiling for her. But her silence was as cold as the Canadian winter. If there had

been a time when he thought she might recall him, that hope was dead. She wanted neither him nor his handiwork. The virtue had gone out of him. He could work no more.

He lay there and let his mind wander back on the worn pathways of his art, as they ran through other lands and ages. He saw colossal figures traveling there, not bowed like him, but walking at their ease, triumphantly. He felt a sharp hunger to know what made the sun so bright on those pure faces. In his humility he could not dream that his face also shone to those afar from him. What was the light, he went on thinking, that made the masters paint a mother and her child so that they seemed to be the Mother of God and God Himself?

There was a step at the door, and glancing first at the candle, to be sure it burned, he shut his eyes lest Gaspard detect the trouble in them. The door opened and closed carefully.

“It burns, Gaspard,” he said, to break the silence. “It must be fragrant.” Then the words sounded broken to him, and he moved his head impatiently.

“It is very fragrant after the outer air,” returned a woman’s voice. “Bayberry!”

His eyes came open.

"Winifred!" he breathed.

She stood there in the opulence of her charm, filling the bare room with some new emanation. To his hungering eyes she was a dream, and while she stayed so he lay learning her by heart, as she pulled off her gloves, and then threw back her fur-lined cloak and unpinned the close fur cap that bound her hair. Suddenly he noticed her hands, white, firm, with but one ring upon them — a wedding-ring. He came to his feet.

"You are alive," he whispered. "You are real. It is you."

She had laid her cloak on a chair. Now she faced him, not in her old imperious manner, but with a smile including him in some mood too large to be quite personal. She did not offer him her hand. He noticed that; it filled him with wonder, and so did his own vein of strange abeyance. When she had come to him in dreams, he had met her with a passionate will to sweep the past into the dust to pave their future. Now she was here, and they stood apart.

"How you have changed!" he said irresponsibly.

She smiled at him and took the great chair

Gaspard had fashioned out of twisted boughs. It became her like a throne. Latham threw on a log, and brought out the chair's mate from among the shadows. There they sat, man and woman, in the place of man and wife, beside the hearth, but held apart by some strange fiat they must both accept. She stretched her hand out to the blaze, and seemed to fall into the happy ease of home-coming. He knelt and took off her thick, fur-topped overshoes, and while he did it his puzzled mind interrogated itself. There was some vital change in her, like the luxuriance of swift ripening. She was ampler. Her shoulders had a gracious curve, sinking into the sweet hollow that invites the cheek. It was no fancy of his clever eye that found new meanings in her face. The frost-flush on it from the night was settling into a rose-bloom by the fire. Her dark hair had a softer sweep, the grace of a more careless fall. Everything about her suggested a woman who had broken from the mould of habit and was growing, no one could say whither, as the germs of life break from a bulb and spread their rootlets underground.

“ How am I changed ? ” she asked.

Even her voice had rich complexities. It was

not the considered note of the woman who had spun epigrams, embroidering them with laughter. It was an instrument of another kind.

"You are a different creature." He spoke dispassionately. At the moment she seemed to be some precious book for them to read together: not the volume of his love.

She leaned back in the gnarly chair and put her foot out to the fire.

"I hope I am different," she said musingly, yet with a clear-cut emphasis. "I have tried to be. I said to myself, a year ago last March, 'If my mind is worth anything, it can take control of my own nature and turn it where it twists, unsnarl it where it fails to fit the pattern.' I said I would do that, and do it quickly. And I have done it."

"You are cleverer than I," he returned, from a bitter humility. "I have not changed."

She smiled at him with a tenderness he might have read, had he been arrogant, as some loyal acquiescence in his former state. It roused in him a wistful questioning. But he could not stay to dwell on his own phases of response. What he chiefly felt was curiosity over her. She was at ease in new endowment, and he longed to

understand it : not as something he could share — only a lending out of nature's treasury.

"Tell me," he said, "what changed you so?"

She settled closer in her seat, with the air of devoting herself to a long story ; but he fore-stalled her.

"Winifred," he burst forth, "where did you come from ? How did you get here — *here* ?"

The tardiness of his wonder showed how often she had been with him in that very room. The four walls knew the vision of her, no more to be remembered now than heralds, after the complete event. Some little stroke of fact had touched the bubble of his fancy, and he continued :—

"I left you in New York. You appear here at night, like a spirit, in these Canadian woods. Is any one with you ?"

"I came alone." Again she laughed, and her mirth had many blended notes from other stories in the background of the one she had to tell.

"Where did you come from ?" he asked again.

"I came from over there." She pointed through the window to the light across the lake.

"From the lighthouse ?" he asked, not remembering that the name belonged only to the fancies of his solitary life.

"Do you call it that? I do, too, in mind. I keep the light there for you. I live there, dear."

The tender word slipped from her lips like an unheeded commonplace. She spoke it as wives do who use it every day, forgetting it is not a name.

He felt himself crimsoning to his hair. It seemed a precious bit of wreckage saved out of old memory.

"You live there? Tell me, Winifred."

Her cheeks took on a ruddier flush, her voice fell upon a deepened tone. Yet she spoke with the mature dignity that became her like an armor of her sex.

"You must let me tell it as I can," she said. "It is difficult. When you went away, I knew at once I must be near you. I had them hire the old hotel. I moved there with a man and two women. I have lived there ever since."

"You wanted" — he stopped when something clutched him by the throat; but his response to that one sentence throbbed hotly in his mind — "you wanted to be near me!"

"There were a great many things I had n't learned then," she said, with sweet composure, — "things I learned slowly afterwards. I had made a mistake. All that year we were together

was a mistake. I was a tyrant. I wanted you to be on the pinnacle of everything. Fame, money — I wanted you to have it all. I scourged you into the market-place. I should have let you live your life, and, if you were willing, lived it with you."

He put out his hands blindly, but she did not take them. She shook her head and brushed the tears away.

"I must snuff the candle," she said practically, and went to do it, her figure making gracious movement in the room. "I feel as if it must be done solemnly," she added, with that tenderness which seemed overflowing, so that there was, he thought in wonder, a little now for everything. "Blessed old Gaspard! He told me it would be burning."

"Gaspard? What do you know about Gaspard?"

"I know him very well," she said, returning to her place. "I trapped him once in the woods, and sat down and talked to him. He understands all kinds of things. I told him I was the man's wife, living apart from him for reasons. If the man fell sick, Gaspard was to come for me. He promised."

"You have been here all this time? You have lived here — roughly — it is hard living here in winter weather" —

"You were living so. I had to make my ways fit yours. Besides — when I began to live so — I had to be near you. There was no other way. I had to be." Suddenly she came to her feet. "There are canvases along that wall," she said, in vivid interest. "You have worked hard. Gaspard told me so." She turned the faces of the pictures toward her, one and then another.

"There is no light."

"I can see what they are." Excitement thrilled her tone. She bent toward them exultantly. "It is true. I knew it. The certain stroke! There is your old touch, faithful, sincere, and besides that — Maurice, you've caught the vision of things, — that something which is not the thing itself. Oh, how proud I am!"

He, too, had risen, and now he touched her sleeve. "Let the pictures wait," he said. "Come back here to the fire."

Whatever moved his tone awoke in her old memories of him, before love turned to doubt. It shook her. For the first time, her prearranged

composure was overthrown. But back in her place, she looked at him serenely.

"Tell me more," he commanded, that new note beating through his voice. "You came here to live. I never knew. I never saw you."

"I nearly saw you. It was over by the mountain that first summer. I was wandering, as I did sometimes, when my fits of homesickness were on me. I met Gaspard. He pointed. 'M'sieu' is there,' he said, 'painting the trees.' If I took three steps, I should see you. I was sick with the need of you. But I turned back."

"You were homesick. Yet you stayed."

"It was easier to stay. I was not homesick for a place. It was for you."

In spite of all the candor of her speech, something held them still apart. The old appeal was silent, the involuntary call that used to sting his senses to a quickened life and lash his brain to race with hers. It was not that any charm had waned or failed in her. She was not less, but more, than his adoring eyes had prophesied. She seemed to hold upon her open palm a world of promise. She was not only Winifred, but a type, and ecstasy trembled in him at the premonition of what life might be beside her. Yet he could only say,—

"I was there and you would not speak to me!"

"I could n't." Hot feeling rushed into her face and her eyes were wet. "I could n't speak, any more than the soldier sent with orders. I had my task. I had things to learn without you. Ah, you would have laughed, Maurice," — she laughed herself now, like a child, — "to see me courting 'all outdoors' because that was your country. You know, up to that time I'd 'gone away' in the summer. I had botanized, and studied strata, and sat on piazzas and talked Dante. Heavens, dear! what a fool I'd been! It dawned on me the minute you threw me off" —

"No, Winifred, no!"

"Not consciously; but your honest soul denied me — it dawned on me what a poor shell of a thing I must have been to fail you so. And when I came here to learn my lesson, I lived out of doors. I looked. I listened all day long. I didn't study. There were no text-books. I have n't named the birds. They can fly high or low, for me. But I know, Maurice, I know what you see in the earth, to make you paint it so. I have lived in the woods, Maurice, just like you. I

could stay here all my days. I said to myself in the beginning, ‘If there are any films between me and natural life, as that man feels it, I’ll sweep them all away.’ And I have done it.”

The strangest part of it all was his conviction of her honesty. This was no new pageantry of a mobile brain. It was a return. The woman had always been of elemental stuff within. She had stripped away embroidery, and there it was — the heart of her.

“ You did that,” he said, “ you lived all that out, here, alone ” —

She came to her feet with a swift motion, fired by unconscious grace.

“ No,” she said, in a thrilling voice, — “ no, I was not alone.”

“ You were not alone ? ”

“ I had — your son.”

“ My — son ! ”

He also rose, and they faced each other in challenge and reply. She bent toward him, drooping with a pliant sweetness. Her face had melted. Her quivering mouth had curves in it.

“ You left me in March,” she said, with that humility of triumph springing from the glories that are given, not earned. “ Your son was born

before Thanksgiving." Then, as he looked at her, she put out her hands toward him with a cry, "Maurice, love me — love me!"

He took her into his arms, gently at first, from awe of that new sacredness about her, and kept her there, forgetting it. This was the renewing spring of love. She was his wife again, his by the moment's mystery as if no third creature had come to make her nature manifold. She drew away from him.

"You must be proud of him," she said, "your son. His legs are strong. There are such creases in them!"

She laughed, but the man could not echo her. The stress upon him had turned his face to quivering pallor, and she understood. He took his chair again, and she brought a stool and sat there at his side where his hands could cherish her and their cheeks might touch. He was broken with wonder over her.

"You stayed down here when he came?" he mused. "In the snow, in this wild place!"

She laughed again, with some whimsical pity for herself and the remembered drama of the time.

"Doctor Susan came and stayed with me. I

had a nurse, — two nurses. I had everything. Yet, I said, other women, even without luxuries, have their children in this lonesome country. Why not I? Besides, I told you I had to be near you. That very night I saw your lamp. It was my star."

He held her hands hard, thinking swift thoughts he could not say. But she knew as if he had spoken.

"Yes," she assented, "you would have come. But that was a part of my task, to stay away from you till I was different. No, dear, it was no risk. I am strong. When we are like that, when we love anything so — our spirits rule our bodies. We live through everything. I knew your child would be strong, too. He was — a little savage." She rose with a repentant cry, and went to snuff the candle. Then she came back to him. "There is so much to tell you, Maurice," she said, "things I stole from you in living them through alone. But every minute you were in my mind. I never bared my breast to feed him without seeing you, standing there before us, grave, protecting us — the mother and the child. I never threw him higher to my shoulder, with that little shrug you spoke of once, without that

thought of you. I told him all the things I wanted to tell you : how I ached for you in spite of him, how he never for a minute weaned me from you. All these months I've planned how I would give him to you. Almost always I thought it would be some spring day when you were painting in the woods, and I would walk in on you from the thicket and push him toward you — yes, I knew he 'd walk before you saw him — and say, ‘Here is your son.’ ” She laughed with a sweet irony for herself. “But I could n't wait, dear, I could n't wait. I thought of the light burning here — Gaspard's candle — and it beckoned, like a star. I had to come alone. Babies can't be brought out on a night like this, even for you.”

He sat drawing breaths that shook him.

“I can't say things, Winifred,” he began at last, “any more than I could then. But”— He bent over her and laid his cheek upon her hair.

“I know,” she answered eagerly, “I know it all. Only have faith in me !”

“Faith in you !”

“I mean, believe me when I say the other woman has quite gone, the one that plagued you.

You 'll say, when you think it over, ' How could she change so soon ? ' But don't you see, dear, it was the miracle ! I had to change, to make your son what he must be. He had to be sweet-natured, firm, and sound — a man-child. I threw away the baser part of me and never thought of it again. Ambitions were gone, selfishness, the cruelty of love. I was the mother of your son."

His eyes were wet.

" And I " — he said. " Well, Winifred, we 'll see."

" Oh, you will be !" she cried, answering his thought. " You were all ready to be the father of a man-child. You had been growing for years, straight, strong, just like the trees. I had to be pruned ; I had to lose my sap and heal, and start new leaves to cover up the scars. But I 'm getting into shape. That is the miracle." She rose. " I must go back," she said, patting her hair into place with that pretty motion women have.

Instantly his artist's eye supplied a child's hand there, pulling it into tangles. He was aware that he should never see her now outside the miracle. The bloom of that new wonder filled the cabin. It would fill the world. He, too, had risen, and when he wrapped her cloak about her,

she turned, as if she had done it every day through all the weeks, and put her face up to be kissed. That taught him something else. The little charms that marked the past were there, all waiting to be born, like seedlings under snow. She needed her lover ; she needed him only less than the mate who would guard the nest. He got his cap and jacket, and at once they both looked at the candle.

"We ought not to leave it," she hesitated.  
"It means too much, that candle."

While they halted, the man asked irrelevantly,  
"Will he be asleep ?"

"Oh, yes ! He 's in his bed by dusk."

"Will he — I suppose he 'll hate me like the dickens ! "

"He 'll roar at your rough cheek." She put up her hand to touch it. "No man has ever kissed him. Oh, there 's Gaspard ! "

The door swung in gently, according to Gaspard's decent habit. He liked soft, slow ways of doing things. He brought the cold with him, and after the clarity of it the bayberry wax saluted his nostrils sweetly.

"Ah !" he breathed. Then he snatched off his cap and made a bow. "Madame ! "

She gave him her hand, and Gaspard took it as if it were something precious.

"Where have you been?" asked Latham, because there was nothing else to say.

"I have been to the Pine Inlet, m'sieu', where the trees sing so loud. It is like the sea."

"Will you come to dinner to-morrow?" asked Winifred. She was smiling at him with wet eyes.  
"Yes, Gaspard?"

"No, madame, I thank you. I am better with a bone in my fingers, and my thoughts. I shall play my fiddle. The day will pass."

Latham's hand was on the door. "So the trees sang like the sea?" he said, smiling, for one friendly word the more.

"Yes, m'sieu', like a miracle."

"You believe in miracles, Gaspard?"

"Assuredly, madame."

"What is your idea of a miracle, Gaspard?"

"It is something that does not happen every day."

"Yet it may happen?"

"Oh, yes, madame! It does."

Then the man and his wife went out across the lake to find the child.

## **THE MAP OF THE COUNTRY**



## THE MAP OF THE COUNTRY

A LONG-DELAYED hour had come. It was the night before their marriage, and they two stood alone in the library, free yet from the scent of flowers, its solitude unbroken by the feet of coming guests. She stretched her arms high above her head, and the white sleeves fell away from them, leaving their roundness bare; the sapphires of his bracelet gleamed dark upon her wrist, a pledge and promise. She looked like a young priestess exalted beyond belief, and moved supremely by the rites before her.

"Oh," she breathed passionately, "I am saying good-by to my lover!"

He stepped forward, and brought down her arms to lie about his neck.

"Good-by?" he repeated, "and to your lover? You are binding him to you forever. A word from us both, and it is done."

She looked at him, and her mood broke up into a charming audacity not unmixed with mirth. She was still exalted, but now, from some emotion purely human, she would balk at nothing.

"Come and sit down," said she, "here in this window-seat. Tell me, have I been a good sweetheart — nice, fine, dear?"

"You are wonderful, perfect; and you always have been."

"I thought you thought so. Now I'll tell you the secret of it all. It's because I'm wise enough to order my ways. I have n't lived in Vanity Fair for nothing. Moreover, I know how to be the very perfectest wife under heaven: so perfect that you'll find yourself lonesome as death when I die and you take unto yourself another."

"Don't, love! That's blasphemy, to-night especially. But I'll forgive it you. Of course you'll be a perfect wife. It's your nature."

"No, no, it's not my nature! It's by grace. I'm like all the rest, and to-night I prove it. I saw my plan of action, and I followed it, all through courting-time; and now, when the field's to be won, I turn traitor. I show you my chart of warfare; woman-like, I betray myself."

He frowned, but only from perplexity. She had seemed so simple. Other folk had called her clever. Other men stood admiringly aloof; but he had known she was soft and smooth as unsnarled silk. Now she spoke like a change-

ling, and he looked about him for his own good child.

"I can't have you talk like that," he said. "Warfare? betrayal? One would think we were enemies."

"Oh, no! oh, no! only antagonists. There's antagonism between us — old as sex. That's why we long for each other. That's why we keep our orbits, drawn and yet pushed apart. Oh, it's a heavenly track! but don't make the mistake of thinking it can be held without the force of all the hands in all the universe. Listen, my dear, my lord! You know I love you?"

"Yes, yes! I know you do."

"I love you so much that, if I could, I'd efface the Me in me to make you happy. If I could! I know exactly how, and yet *I shall not do it*. We must go the way of all the others, running violently down a steep place into the sea of dreary common sense."

"Oh, come now, that's not fair! Think of all the happy people we know — your father and mother, mine. It's easy enough to say the bitter thing about marriage — mighty cheap talking — but it's not fair."

"All the happy people we know! I can sum-

mon six. That's a good many. The rest have built them solid houses on the boulevard. Their castles tumbled down. But I can make you happy. Dearest, I will ; still, being, as I said, a fool to-night, light-headed, dizzy with much thought, I throw prudence to the winds and tell you the straight road. Do you know why you've seemed to love me so in all these months?"

"Seemed? Why, because I do. Because you are you, and I am I."

"Yes, that; I'm not denying the divinity of the thing. You've loved me indeed; but you've seemed to love me, too, and for one reason only. Because you are a man, born to the pleasures of the chase. I liked it, too. I was pursued; I exulted in it. To-morrow I am caught, labeled, put in my cage. I shall have fresh water and lots of sun, but the chase is over. You won't continue running when there's nothing to catch."

"But, dear love" —

"Nay, why should you? Why, indeed! But that's where the subtlety of it comes in, the irony we never guess till late. You see I like being pursued, and I shall keep on liking it. I shall look round me on the big, big downs, and say, 'Where's the footfall I used to hear?'"

“ Margaret ! Margaret ! ”

“ Now, ‘ List to me, my only love ! ’ Here is something that women have learned and men have not. I ’ll tell it to you, and then you ’ll be the only man that knows. Won’t that be grand ? To you, all of you, marriage is an attainment ; to us, it ’s a progress. You marry, and settle down with your pipe by the fire. I ’m just as nice and just as fair as when you found new beauties in me every day, but now you judge me *au large*. You don’t make inventories and read them aloud : item, one sweet temper ; item, one bit of grace ; item, one round cheek. I am a part of you, and it would be sore conceit thus to admire yourself. But if you did keep on idealizing me, if you did wrap me round with illusions, why, all our dreams would come true. You ’d make an angel of me ; and as for me, God knows I ’m only too eager to call the archangel out of you.”

“ Suppose I don’t. Suppose I go ‘ the way of all the rest.’ What then ? What will you do ? ”

“ I individually, or I the perfect wife ? ”

“ Both ! You are the perfect wife.”

“ I ’ll tell you. I shall find out, one day, that life has got to be a little comedy, and that I am the star. I shall say, ‘ You don’t want the inner

part of me? You don't want to be bothered with the loves and doves that made your courtship bright? Very well, my lord, choose you!' And I shall be what you will: docile, sweet, unchanging, and you will never know you've lost me."

"Lost you — you, Margaret?"

"Yes, the real Me inside me, the one that longs to tell its hopes and fears and whims and fancies. For the life of the soul is real — real as oatmeal and clear coffee in the morning."

"Go on, Margaret. I like this. What else will she do, the perfect wife?"

"She will stifle lots of the natural impulses of her nature, and one especially. She will never say, 'Do you love me?' Never! never! She will stand listening at the door of your heart in still mornings and dark nights, hoping for it, hoping, hoping, wondering why it brooded over her in the old days, and now nests far aloof — but she'll never, never ask."

"But, Margaret, my child, you'll know I love you. Every day will show you. How can you doubt?"

"I should n't doubt. But I should want to hear. Do you stop saying your creed because you've learned it? For love will mean some-

thing else then. Now it says, ‘I’ve chosen you. I want you.’ Then it would be, ‘You are all I thought; yes, more! You are sweeter, fairer. I am grown closer to you.’ But you won’t say it, and I, if I’m clever, shall never beg you to.”

“Not say it? Why sha’n’t I say it?”

“Truly, Tom, I don’t know! Just because men don’t. I’ve observed them. They can’t, after twelve months. It’s morally impossible. You get used to joy, as you do to the sunset. I notice you don’t write poems to the clouds in the west. You just take your pipe out of your mouth long enough to remark, ‘By George!’ and then go on smoking. But you prize the sunset just the same.”

“I see. I’m not clever, but I can understand. Some men do talk about the sunset. They make poems, and gabble everlastingly. You don’t like my kind, that’s all.”

“Not like your kind? I adore it. You’re just plain man. Them’s the jockeys for me. (Oh, don’t look at me owlishly, with your grand air! It’s a quotation, and I’m stark mad to-night. I’ll quote what I please, if it hits the prayer-book.) I love your kind, and you supremest.

But I don't expect you to be articulate. You won't be. You can't."

"Now, it's no fair. I won't play. It seems to me I've spent the last ten months in telling you that one thing — I love you. And I'm ready for the home stretch, — ten years, twenty, sixty!"

"Dear one, how good you are! But it won't avail us. You think you'll go on saying that baby catechism, but you won't. That's the A B C; you'll clamor for Third Readers. And believe me, I would n't have you other than your kind. Marry a pioneer? Not I! The van of human-racing's not for me. Only, as I say, you shall be left to your silence. You sha'n't be nagged. Not you!"

"What next? Read us the prohibitory statutes."

"Margaret enlightening the world! Well, I will. I'd tell you the scheme of creation to-night, if I knew it. Rule two: I shall never criticise you."

"Then how shall I know when I offend?"

"You won't, but we must put up with that, both of us. It will be more or less stultifying, and we sha'n't breathe quite so freely, living in a fog. But that's of course. You must

criticise me, you know, and I shall change — like a chameleon. That 's woman's way. It distinctly is n't man's."

" Do you mean to tell me a man can't stand up and listen to his faults, and — yes, by Jove, be glad to listen ? "

" My lord, no ! not from the creature nearest him. Perhaps it savors too much of a house divided against itself, and he dreads the roof about his ears. I 've observed that, also. If somebody who is not your wife reproves you with a pretty pout, you say she 's fastidious, and it makes you fain to climb. But madam ! she 's a shrew. Away with her to the pond ! "

" And so there is not to be the most perfect confidence between us ? We are not to think aloud, lay our hearts bare."

" Not by any manner of means ! We are to live in little citadels of rose-colored reserve. I 'm to say to myself, ' In all the big things of life — all the things that matter — he 's perfection. Let the little ones buzz about my ears like gnats. They won 't sting me — *much* — and if they do, pray Heaven he does n't see the scar ! ' A fair cheek or no favor ! But do you know what will happen ? "

"An earthquake, I should hope. Or thunder ! Anything to clear the air."

"We shall live together fifty years in unbroken tranquillity, and you will never know you've married a whirlwind. Then some day I shall do just what I have to-night. I shall say, 'Tom, I hate, *hate* to have you wear side whiskers.' "

"But I don't!"

"Child, that's only an illustration. I was n't born literary, but I hope I know where to find a metaphor at need. 'I loathe your great-grandmother's picture. I'm unspeakably nervous when you play the fife after ten o'clock. I detest your habit of plaid trousers.' "

"And all these things could have been amended fifty years before, if you'd only spoken up, and said so ! "

"Yes, Tom, so it appears to you now, and so it would appear to me then, or I should n't speak at all. I should be deluded by the strange thing we call a sense of justice, that rises up in us and cries, 'You have no business to let me be bothered by the midges you could sweep away with a breath.' And next day, bewailing my lost bower, what do you think I should do ?"

"I'm at the point now where I don't know

what anybody would do. Go on, you queer woman-thing!"

"I should curl up close to you, and tell you I was nervous and had a headache. And all the rest of my life I should try to make you forget."

"But all this is n't fair, Margaret. It is n't square dealing between man and man."

"Ah, but it is n't man to man. It's man and woman. That's what complicates it."

"I don't care. There ought to be rules to hit our common humanity; they should work both ways. You expect me to know things by intuition, and do things I can't see. Is it fair?"

"Not a bit. But I'm going to do things I *do* see, for reasons I want to kick over the moon. It's as broad as it is long."

"What reasons?"

"Well, reasons I respect awfully in the main, but which are like sackcloth in the wearing. You see, really and truly, Tom, I do reverence you beyond belief; and that reverence must go into the detail I hate. It must even keep me from revolt when you stroke my fur crosswise. It must make me finely courteous to you—always—always. It must make me vow I will exact nothing."

"But suppose I think you've a right to exact?"

"Ah, that shows how dear you are, but it makes it no more possible to do it. If I am a wise woman, I shall refrain. The soul is an awful goddess, Tom. We don't talk about her much, but she's there just the same. Stay outside the veil, and she'll whisper to you all day long; but invade her shrine, and she slips away. Worship her, and she'll follow; hunt her home, and you've lost her. It's because she's so shy and sweet that when you seem to change to me, I sha'n't say, 'Why?'"

"When I change! How queer it sounds!"

"When you *seem* to change. When I've lived near you so long that you forget whose breath it is, they mingle so. Then I shall stay beside you very softly, never once saying, 'You used to do thus and so.' I shall realize you're turning, growing, stretching up, and pray the Almighty, who contains us both, that I may grow, too, and that our new branches mingle. You shall be free, dear one. There shall be no shadow of a bond."

"But I want bonds. I exult in them, when it's you. I demand them."

"Ah, so do I! and the outer ones — the ones of inner honor, too — we shall reverence beyond words. We shall keep every jot and tittle of the sacred law. But, nevertheless, we shall guard the soul inviolate. She shall have her wings."

"So there are days when we do not really meet!"

"Yes; days when you, monsieur, do not appear at the rendezvous. It's woman's sneaking habit to be always there. And on those days, when you are five sixteenths indifferent to me, I shall become — another Margaret. I shall put on doublet and hose. Do you know, I've always wanted to write an essay entitled 'Concerning the Art of Being a Man'? For we've that to learn of you. When you are in trouble or perplexity, and your castle falls about your ears, what do you do? Go out into the world, and try to forget. But we! we sit and mull at home, growing sodden with tears. We think it a species of disloyalty to put our grief in a precious box and hand it back to Almighty God to keep for us, while we try to beguile our minds. But I have learned the formula. I know! When you drop away from me ever so little, I shall go out — out — anywhere; under the sky,

among people. I shall try to find some joyance with my kind, and then, if I come back and we renew ours together, so much the happier I."

"Margaret, you have put me miles away."

"Yes; is n't it cold and dreadful — for a minute? But that does n't last. It's the only way to be near together. If we clutch and cling, we sha'n't get anything but the air. If we reverence each other — serve each other — why, some day we shall realize that, as much as two souls can be, we are fused into the one."

He sat looking at her in amazement. Her face was white and passionate. The hands he held were growing cold.

"Margaret," he said, "how do you know all these things? Marriage — *my* marriage — is a simple enough state, full of happiness, content. You've been studying the internal polity. Where did you get your data? Does it come to round, silky-headed things unsought?"

The woman-look came into her eyes, the look of brooding and perhaps premonitory pain. She shook her head sadly, and smiled.

"We know lots of things we're never told," she said — "things like these. Sometimes I think we evolved them through the generations

when you went to war and we stayed at home and mused over the cradle. It's our kingdom, really, you see, Tom. You're only Prince Consort. Don't you know that's why we are so pathetically different? It's a wonder we can speak a syllable of the same language. Our life has been all within for so many years that we keep the habit of secret complex living, yet. You must be patient with us. We spend our days hewing out our own crosses; you must come and give us drink."

She shook her head, with a very solemn look from far away.

"There's one pitfall," she said, "from which not even wisdom shall save me. Have I not learned the fallacy of wholesale betrayal? Have I not seen the woman sink and fail who throws away restraint and owns her worship? If she had kept one little fortress of reserve! If he had thought there was some inch of her he could not win! But no, poor princess! She pours her dowry down before him, and then walks beggared. If I could convince you that I should live if you deserted me! But no! I've told you I shall not, and I shall tell you yet again."

Silence fell between them, and in its hush

she seemed to waken from another state—an unfamiliar one. She looked at him apprehensively; she shrank a little from his glance.

"And after all," he said at last, "I have n't known you a bit. I did n't guess you had these thoughts, half fears, half tremors. Why, Margaret, you make me wonder whether you really will be glad!"

She stopped him, not by a word, but a swift curling up against his breast. He forgot what he was beginning to think, and gathered the whole sweet burden of her into his arms. She laid her cheek against his, and whispered him divinely:—

"What did I say, love? Forget it. These things don't matter. Nothing does but you. I'm not myself to-night. My head aches a little, and I'm nervous."

The formula rang familiar in his ear. It seemed to him he might have heard it, not long before; yet when he looked down into her eyes, they were wells of shining light, and he found only his own image there. But as they sat thinking over the dear new world to be born to-morrow, another thrill of memory wakened in his brain. The tendency of their talk looked to him all of a piece.

"Dear!" he said. "Dear!" Then he stopped. Something was glimmering before him, vague though palpable. Suddenly the outlined vision rose and took its shape to his mind's eye.

"Margaret," said he, "seems to me we've both been trying the boot on one foot. My faults, and how to weather them! I don't want to say it, but — how about *your* faults, dear?"

She pushed herself back at arm's length, her hands on his shoulders. Her eyes widened in a lovely and unreasoning terror.

"Why, Tom," she breathed, "you said — you've often said — I have n't any!"

He put her hands passionately to his lips.

"And it's true," he vowed. "It's God's truth. You have n't one."

They sat there still, knowing the unknown country was before them, and they were not afraid. At least the man was not; but the woman shivered a little, now and then. She was not adventurous, and she had chanced upon the bones of other travelers.



## **THE TRYST**



## THE TRYST

A MAN and woman were sitting on the veranda in the moonlight, looking out over the garden below them and multiplying their pleasure by creating absently, through an involuntary trick of the mind, the beauties they remembered there by day. It was early springtime, and besides the smell of leaf mould and moist earth, there was the odor of lilies of the valley, and the imagined scent of ladies'-delight, too subtle to reach the nostrils save through the memory of those who knew their habitat. The man was not young and the woman was twenty-five ; but still it was a lover and his lass with the world before them. That night it might have been entirely theirs, they seemed so much alone. The house was still. One of the family had gone here, another there. Even the servants had dispersed.

The man and woman sat side by side, her hand in his, and his touch on the ring he had given her. She was in white, and the moonlight transmuted her girl's beauty to the angelic charm brought by the night alone. She looked at the

garden and not at him, but she knew the line his shoulders made, silhouetted against the light.

"This is one of the nights you read about," said he.

"It seems as if we had everything in the world," she answered. "We are young"—

"Speak for yourself. I'm thirty-nine."

"I wish you would n't say that."

"Why?"

"I don't know. It separates us a little, the way you say it. I wish I were thirty-nine."

"No you don't, child. When I'm sixty-five you'll be fourteen years younger. You'll be spry on your feet and I shall be creaking on stiff joints.

"His trousers I'll wash,  
And his grog still I'll make."

"That's what you'll do, my Polly."

"I wonder which of us will die first!" She said it with the pathetic melancholy of youth.

"Don't be owlish, dear."

"I think of it a lot. I see you left alone. I see myself alone. Then I have another pang. I'm afraid we sha'n't find each other after death. Are n't you afraid?"

"Never."

"Ah, that's good!"

She made a little involuntary movement toward him, and he met it with an arm about her, and a kiss. But when the kiss was given, he returned patiently to a point more than once at issue between them.

"It's only fair to repeat what I've told you a million times, to your unfailing disappointment. My imagination does n't concern itself with any possibility of a life after death. My faith never compassed it. My will does not demand it. I simply don't know anything about it. And I don't think about it."

"But you want it?"

"I don't know. I want it if it's decreed, chiefly because, if I have learned any one thing, it is that it's time wasted to go ag'in the government. Margaret Fuller said she'd accepted the universe. Carlyle remarked, 'Gad! she'd better.' I'm with Carlyle."

She spoke with the passion of ungoverned youth.

"But you want me!"

He took both her hands and kept them.

"I've got you," he said plainly.

"I mean forever!"

"Well, so do I, what forever there is. But I refuse to define it. I refuse to project myself beyond this special minute in this particular garden with this very satisfactory brand of moonlight. This one instant is mine. I am not going to spend it gambling for a problematic æon on another planet. No, ma'am!"

But she was yearning forward toward the other planet. Time was valueless to her, save as it made eternity. She saw their union braided with the other great love stories, destiny welded and held by bonds of faith. Her headstrong imagination projected itself into other states of being where she must find herself at one with him, her chosen mate.

"I wish you would believe," she said.

"What, dear?"

"That we live again. That we find each other."

"Dear, I can't. That is, I can't formulate. I do believe, as you call it, to a certain extent. I shall exist. I shall be changed. Yes, I believe that. But changed into another individual? I don't know. I may be fused into something like that." He pointed before him.

"What?"

"The garden. That has a life of its own, a life more or less like mine. I'm a little bit like Pan, dear. I was made out of the earth. I understand it. That's all I pretend to understand. Well, the earth will have room for me. Don't you be afraid."

"You make me lonesome." Her hands sought him, as if to keep him tangible and near.

He laughed tenderly.

"You talk about your faith," he said. "It has n't half the staying power of my acquiescence. You have to persuade yourself that I shall rise in the body and wear a pot-hat. I trust myself to the ground."

A vague sickness had crept upon her out of the beautiful night. She felt the disquiet of anticipated trouble under the failure of being to fulfill itself as she had conjectured it. Life fluctuated about her. She longed for some isle of certainty in the midst of ranging seas. Again, in anticipation she saw herself widowed, and longed for a vow that should preclude eternal loneliness.

"Dear," she said, "promise me something."

"Yes."

He spoke with the freedom accorded a woman who will ask only what is just.

"Promise me, if you die first, to come to me."

The smile on his face had swift interpretation in the fondness of his voice.

"Dear Polly," he said, "have we got to walk all the paths the other lads and lasses trod before us?"

"Promise me!"

"Oh, yes! I'll promise. When shall I come?"

"When you leave the body."

"You take it for granted that I'm to leave it first."

"Ah! there's no need of my promising. If I die first, I shall find you."

He spoke gravely for one who considered the possibility remote.

"I wouldn't say that, dear. It might be hard. Better yield to the course of things as they are made for us, don't you see?"

"Yes, but you are willing to risk it. You promise quite carelessly. It might be hard for either of us, but you risk it."

"I risk it because you ask me. But I don't like to think of your delicate wings trying to beat against the winds of destiny for something outside destiny. Believe me, dear, it is not de-

creed, or, if there are spirits, they would batter down the walls."

"Ah, but you own it is possible. The one or two can do it — the ones that have immortal courage out of immortal love."

"Yes, but I'm pretty well convinced that courage can be put to better uses. It must be thrown into the channels all can take."

"Now you make me happy."

His acceptance of her mood unstrung the nerves of her desire. That he was willing to meet her on the ground of spiritual fantasy seemed to secure them both a freehold there.

"Why do I make you happy? I am throwing cold water and you don't feel it."

"You are willing to talk about it. You consider the possibility. It makes me see that when your mind is off its guard, you really do believe in the immortal life."

"No, my dear." He spoke with a sudden gravity. "Don't make any mistake about that. We must n't build any expectations on verbal capers. I don't believe, in the least, as you do. Shall I say it all again? I am a part of it" — He stretched his hand again toward the illimitable night. "It holds me, feeds me. When I

die, it will receive me. I trust myself to it in that minute as much as I do in this. But I am going to lie down in my little shallop and go wherever the waves will take me. I don't propose to spend this very tangible life in inventing some double-back action contrivance for propelling me through space against the tide." He felt her tears upon his face. Instantly the spirit that cherished her against her knowledge awoke in him. "Bless my soul, Polly!" said he, rousing himself. "You care awfully, you little beggar!"

She was trembling against his shoulder.

"It is like losing you," she breathed. "It is like death."

He gave her a little shake, and at the same time dispelled his own speculative fancy.

"See here, dear," he said, "now you listen to me. I don't refuse a tryst. I'm not poor-spirited."

"Don't joke about it."

"I am not joking. If there's the least thing you really care about in the universe, I'll get it for you, if I can. Now, listen. It may not be wise, but if I die before you I'll come to you, if I can, as soon as I get out of the body. Always,

if I can. I'll come to you here, in this garden, under the beech-tree."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, I mean it."

They kissed, and the woman was happy and the man content because of her.

The next night he had gone, and she went to bed early, to forget herself until morning should bring his letter. Apprehension was upon her, but she called it loneliness. Some prescience stretched a finger toward her, saying, Beware! After an hour she rose, threw on a wrapper, and sat down to write him. But her mind balked at the task. It seemed to be groping through some confusion of circumstance too dense to be quite penetrated, and yet with an intelligence words blunder to express. As it had sometimes happened in absence from her lover, she felt toward him a sensitiveness of soul transcending the known means of speech. Presently she did lie down, but upon the outside of the bed, as if in expectation of a summons. Yet her mind had a simpler reason. She meant to keep herself awake until moonrise, and then, watching that splendor, recall the taste of last night's happiness. But her young body yielded, and soon she was asleep.

Suddenly she awoke. Her eyes came open to full knowledge of the beauty of the hour and the clarity of the light by which they saw. This was a different world, fit for deeds, like day, but deeds of quite another kind. She ran her feet into her slippers, and without a pause opened the door softly, and stole down the stairs. The chambers were all open to the air. She heard her mother's voice in some low crooning to the youngest child, and fled softly by. Bran was in the hall, stretched in a square of moonlight, head between paws, his shoulders curved in a leonine bulk. He rose, and made a sleepy yawn, shook off the moods of night, and wagged at her. She turned the key; and slipped out to the veranda, and then down the path to the garden, and the beech-tree. Bran went with her, padding steadily. Something urged her, until she ran across the wilding beds of heart's-ease and slipped under the beech-tree's shade. There she halted, her heart hurrying and her mouth dry. Bran had dropped away from her. She saw him outside in a patch of light, his forepaws planted, his muzzle lifted to the air. She waited, still as he.

Suddenly she felt light-heartedness and great content. Her nerves relaxed. She yielded her-

self to the beauty of the night. The keenness of her sense redoubled, and she saw not only things but their spirit. The shadow of the smallest leaf was plain to her. The tree trunk had a fine-grained tracery the eye rejoiced to feed upon. The air, touching her face, moved rhythmically. The noises of the night were blended into harmony. Thought mounted into feeling, an exquisite consciousness of the universe in its far reaches as in little. She no longer withheld it, clamoring for some estate beyond. She yielded herself, and life took her whither it was decreed. Immediately she understood how all of being is a mobile sea where the atom floats and is not drowned. The natural things gleamed like the Grail, the cup that bears the spirit. What is the spirit? What is the soul of which she talked so glibly when she saw it reft away from earth? Now at last she guessed how it might weave new harmonies, commensurate with this present scheme of things: members to move with, garments to enwrap it, or even the quiescence of the earth and slow streams moving underground. What limitation was there to its rich carelessness? If it slipped one shell, coverts were everywhere.

So she stood motionless in the shade, and the dog waited. The sense of quickened being lasted a long time, as dreams last, but gradually the delight of it ebbed in slow withdrawal. She recognized her own impoverished identity. As consciousness beats at sleeping senses, it began to dawn upon her that she was returning to things as we are accustomed to think of them. This was the garden at night, and she was alone in it. She turned as if to tangible presences, and laying her arms upon the beech-tree bole, sank slowly to her knees. There she stayed until, waking, she found herself, stiffened with the damp and chill, still clinging to the tree. She rose and made her way out from the branches. They touched her kindly ; but they were only branches, not, as they had been, an enfolding tenderness. A bulk came bounding at her, Bran, enraptured at her coming. She put her hand on his head, and they went together to the house.

The next morning her mother found her late in bed.

“ What is it, child ? ” she asked.

“ Nothing,” said the girl. She was wan. Life had gone out of her.

“ Are n’t you going to get up ? ”

"Not yet, mother. I'm tired."

"But tell me what it is."

"Nothing, mother. It was a dream. It tired me."

"A bad dream, dear?"

"No. Beautiful."

That was all she could say. She lay there learning the dream by heart, never to forget it. But at noon, strength came surging in on her. She got up and pulled her curtains, to let in the light. The sun flooded her. It called her back to life as we know it within bounds, and she smiled in its face and lifted her arms to it, as if embracing all created things. She dressed in haste, and ran downstairs. The man she loved was coming up the walk. They met in the shaded hall, and she put her hands on his shoulders. They kissed, like lovers newly met in Paradise. Her white face looked smitten under its delight. His was pale, also, with wonder and some pang of memory.

"It was a dream," she said at last. "You are alive."

He put her away from him, to look at her. She gazed back, until her joy became an anxious questioning.

"Something has happened," she said quickly.  
"You are so pale!"

"You have n't heard?"

"No. Tell me."

"It was last night, dear. The two kids got out and stole the boat for a lark — No! no! they're not drowned. I fished them out. I had a bad time of it with the two of them. I went under. They worked over me pretty nearly all night. I'm here, sweetheart. I'm alive. Don't look like that."

But her rapt eyes held only certainty.

"Dear," she said, "what was it, when you died? Where were you?"

"It was all a dream, sweetheart. I was with you. We were under the beech-tree in a moon-light night, and it was well with us."

## **A DREAM IN THE MORNING**



## A DREAM IN THE MORNING

AND the One to whom are intrusted the newly born into Heaven turned to the soul, faint still with earthly tremors and yet wedded to mortal joys, and said, —

“Thou hast loved much.”

“Yes,” she answered, “and one most of all. Time is empty until he come to me ; and yet the years shall be as days if he come at last.”

Then a shadow, as of human pity, fell upon the face of the One, and he answered, —

“His place is not thine, except he win it by ways full of peril that may not be described.”

“His place shall be mine,” she cried, “if mine may not be his. I will go down to hell, if he be there.”

“Nay,” said the One compassionately, “these be childish words, left of the old earth-babble of place and lot. But choose now. Wilt thou rebel against the Mighty, or wilt thou submit to what hath been decreed from of old ?”

The soul stood white and thin, as if in that moment she endured a second death.

"There is no way," she asked, "by which I can give up my place to him, while I descend and pray for him in his?"

"No way."

"Then must I submit." The soul paled and withered like one in whom the second death had already been accomplished, though the fires of hell were alight in her anguished eyes. She turned her about, and then said, looking back upon the One, —

"Is there not some little instant marked out from all time, when we may meet — an instant only?"

"The instant is thine," said the One, in sweet kindness, "and this is how thou shalt find it. Straight before thee, as thou standest, lies a silver track, and that shalt thou follow till thou hast reached the end which overhangs the void below; and there at the end shalt thou cling, with blackness above thee and blackness beneath. For that way shall he come, after many years, hurled by the winds upon his darkening path. And for as long as thou canst cling to him he is thine."

Then the eyes of the soul became sweetly alive once more : for hope had fed and nourished them.

" And if I cling altogether," she faltered, " and if I draw him back upon the way ? "

" Nay," said the One sorrowfully, " if thou canst, the gift is thine ; but no one hath yet done so fearsome and so great a deed."

The soul paused for no further question, lest she might be denied altogether ; but she hastened swiftly upon the appointed way, as one who sees joy at the end of her journey. And when she had found the silver track, she sped fast upon it, heeding not her loneliness nor the strange fears that would assail her. And as she went, the way narrowed until it lay before her as a line of light, and she could scarce find room upon it for her slender feet. The void above her was black, and the void below lay as a pit where midnight reigned without a star. Yet still her heart prayed ceaselessly to the Love which is for all, that the love which was for one might not lose that which had given it life. And when the way became so narrow that none without wings might traverse it, she lay down, clasping it with both arms, and so crawled outward until she had reached the point overhanging the void.

Now, how long the soul lay clinging there none may know but the Infinite Love with whom all other loves are one ; but it is written that many years went by on earth before yet that other soul, so loved and so desired, was done with mortal life. But there dawned a moment when, like a leaf upon a wailing wind, it came fleeting down the void where lay its mate with stiffening arms but ever-living eyes. And she cried aloud with gladness, “Oh, thou hast come !— thou art mine again !” and with one hand she drew him to her face, so that they clung and kissed as of old, though over the blackness of the void.

“Now thou shalt do as I bid thee,” she broke forth, in sobs, “or else are we undone. Hold thou fast to my hand, and cling to this line of light. Look not behind thee, though my hand be unloosed, but cling with all thy strength ; and when thou hast gained a foothold, walk — nay, run — till thou hast reached the fair country beyond, and, though thou hear me not, look not behind thee.”

So, still clinging with one hand, and holding her love with the other, she dropped her frail figure from its resting-place, and it hung peril-

ously over the nothingness below. And, not knowing what he did, her love climbed fearfully to her place, and made his way along the narrow track, still holding her hand, so that she was dragged painfully for many paces. And there came a moment when she cried,—

“Loose me now, and let me go, and look not back for me !”

She drew her hand from his, and threw up her other arm in silent signal of farewell,—though he might not see it,—and gave herself up to darkness and the pit; but lo! the void would not receive her, and the air was as earth to her joyful feet. And treading thereon, she overtook her love, as he made his slow way upon the narrow road, and walked beside him with cheering words, though only the blackness was under her. And when he comprehended what she had endured for his sake, it was as if he had been new-born, through much travail and anguish, to a knowledge of that which is high, and a scorn of the false joys which had once beguiled him.

The pathway grew wide enough for two, and she trod upon it with him, and hand in hand they went smiling into the pleasant country beyond.

And there the One appointed to cherish the souls newly come into heaven met them with arms outstretched.

"Thou hast loved much," he said to her who had found her joy. "Yea, thou hast loved much."



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